Partnering Locally for National Impact

Shaping the Higher Education Landscape

Data and Learning
Dear Alumni and Friends,

This issue’s cover story highlights a theme that is close to my heart: partnerships. I truly believe in the power of people working together to ensure educational opportunity for children and learners of all ages. As our nation and world confront deep divisions, the relevance of working together to increase opportunity for young people is greater than ever.

When I had the honor last year of giving the annual Constance E. Clayton Lecture at Penn GSE—an event whose namesake is a distinguished Penn GSE alumna, the first African-American and first woman to lead The School District of Philadelphia—I outlined the ingredients of successful partnerships, as indicated by research. Those ingredients include diversity, trust, time, necessity, and a common purpose.

There is a robust body of knowledge that suggests diverse groups generally make better decisions, in part because the members bring different expertise and do not share the same set of blind spots. Trust is necessary because without it, group members cannot benefit from each other’s expertise. Time is essential for the development of this foundation of trust. Partners will not invest the appropriate time and effort, however, unless their work together is necessary to fulfill each partner’s core mission. Finally, a shared purpose allows a partnership to be cohesive even if the participants’ primary commitments or perspectives differ.

At Penn GSE, these factors have allowed our partnership with The School District of Philadelphia to stand the test of time. For decades we have worked together in ways that meet complementary needs, including the District’s need for teachers and leaders and our need to offer practical experience to our students. Our common goal of improving outcomes for children has helped to sustain this work. As you will read starting on page 6, Penn GSE is working with the District and partnering with other Penn schools to take this work to the next level.

Our new dual-degree programs with the Wharton School represent another expanded partnership at Penn GSE. We have opened our Education Entrepreneurship and Education Policy master’s programs to Wharton MBA students, who can fulfill requirements of their program while also earning an M.S.Ed. degree. This partnership broadens the reach of our programs and continues our commitment to bringing together students from varied professional backgrounds to solve problems in education.

Another organization that has successfully combined the ingredients of successful partnerships is the nonprofit Say Yes to Education, the nation’s first and one of the most prominent public education reform organizations. I had the pleasure of visiting the offices of this organization earlier this year. The organization’s mission is to increase high school graduation rates and college attendance rates for high school graduates in the District of Columbia. It has partnered with more than 60 District high schools to achieve its goals.

In addition to its work at the middle and high school levels, Say Yes has partnered with the families of the youngest students in the District of Columbia. In 2015, the organization committed $10 million to support the college success of low-income high school graduates who were the first in their families to attend college. “Say Yes to Education: Black History.”

To date, 134 percent of these students have gone to college with the support of Say Yes. Today, Say Yes now partners with entire communities to make a similar commitment to every public high school student. More than 10,000 students have now partnered with entire communities to make a similar commitment to every public high school student. More than 10,000 students have partnered with entire communities to make a similar commitment to every public high school student.

I had the great pleasure of hosting Mr. Weiss on campus in May at Alumni Weekend before an audience of alumni and friends, as you will see on page 25. It was truly inspiring to discuss his transformative commitment to changing the lives of youth as chairman of Say Yes, on a day dedicated to celebrating the shared purpose of the Penn GSE community.

As a community of leaders, practitioners, researchers, entrepreneurs, and more, Penn GSE has a tremendous impact on education across the nation and around the world. I hope the many stories of our impact in the pages ahead provide fresh inspiration for your own commitment to education.

Pam Grossman
Dean, Penn Graduate School of Education
George and Diane Weiss Professor of Education
To improve education, health, and human services policies and practices through the use of “big data,” Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy (AISP) will launch a training and technical assistance program to help state and local governments link administrative data across multiple agencies through integrated data systems, or IDS. Led by John W. Fantuzzo (Q), Albert M. Greenfield Professor of Human Relations at Penn GSE, and Dennis Cullhane, professor and Dana and Andrew Stone Chair in Social Policy at Penn Social Policy and Practice, AISP coordinates an existing network of sixteen states and counties with IDS capacity. With the addition of eight states and two counties through the training initiative, more than half of the U.S. population will live in a jurisdiction with an integrated data system.

With the aim of promoting the health of boys and young men of color, Penn GSE, Forward Promise will work to counteract the public’s inadequate understanding of at-risk young men and boys of color and their families.

Penn GSE Associate Professor Susan Yoon (Q) received a $1 million grant from the National Science Foundation for the project “BioGraph 2.0: Online professional development for high school biology teachers for teaching and learning about complex systems.” The project’s goal is to provide professional development at low to no cost by enabling online access to high-quality activities that will include video tutorials, a discussion and collaboration forum, and mechanisms for teachers to share best practices.

A conference and a new fellowship are the latest developments in the Penn Futures Project, a cross-campus initiative by Penn GSE, Penn Nursing, and Penn Social Policy and Practice to address issues of health and well-being for families in Philadelphia and beyond. The conference, held in June, brought together researchers, practitioners, and city officials to consider challenges related to parenting, early childhood, and the need for cross-professional solutions involving health, social services, and education. Vivian L. Gofdoden (Q), William T. Carter Professor of Child Development and Education at Penn GSE, was an organizer of the event.

A $2 million endowment from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) will establish the Calvin Bland Faculty Fellowships, with one fellowship in each Penn Futures school, to support research aimed at improving the lives of at-risk young men and boys of color and their families. New faculty member Ed Breckenbrough (Q) has been named the inaugural Calvin Bland Fellow at Penn GSE. The fellowships are named for Penn alumni Calvin Bland, former RWJF chief of staff, health-care executive, and research professor at Rutgers University, whose scholarship and career have explored how to foster health equity across communities. (To read more about Penn Futures, see this issue’s cover story beginning on page 6.)

Penn GSE added a day school track to the Independent School Teaching Residency (ISTR) this summer, expanding the program to include both day and boarding schools. With an innovative and comprehensive curriculum designed specifically for independent schools’ unique settings, ISTR enables aspiring and early-career teachers to receive a master’s degree in education while completing teaching fellowships at host partner schools. Day school fellows will be in residence at ten partner day schools.

Offering free classes to English language learners in Philadelphia, the Practical English for Daily Living (PESLAL) program at Penn GSE (Q) has grown since its founding in 2012 to include classes in four proficiency levels for Penn-affiliated people and in three levels for the general public. Last fall, the latter classes began a partnership with Philadelphia Mayor James Kenny’s Office of Adult Education, which promotes adult literacy. Taught by master’s students in Penn GSE’s Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program, the classes give TESOL students experience teaching in the classroom while also contributing to the community at Penn and beyond.

Amy Benedict, GR’10 (E), joined Penn GSE in August as director of career and professional development, a role that will serve the School’s student body and alumni community. Dr. Benedict was previously director of career services at SUNY Oneonta in upstate New York, leading a comprehensive career development program for more than 6,000 students and 60,000 alumni. She spent twenty-one years at Cornell University, where she served in a variety of roles, including director of career development at the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

Penn GSE Welcomes New Faculty

Penn GSE welcomed the following new faculty in the summer of 2017:

Ed Breckenbrough (Q) is an associate professor in teacher education. Previously associate professor at the University of Rochester, he studies Black male teachers and the educational experiences of LGBTQ youth of color.

Manuel González Canché (Q) is an associate professor in higher education. Previously assistant professor at the Institute of Higher Education, University of Georgia, he uses sophisticated quantitative methods to research college access, persistence, and success.

John D’Aviria (Q) is practice professor in educational leadership. After serving as superintendent of Canton Public Schools, he became president of Teachers21 in Boston. He earned his doctorate in urban educational leadership at the University of Massachusetts.

Sharon Ravitch, GR’00 (B) was appointed practice professor. Previously senior lecturer at Penn GSE, she is a founding codirector of Penn’s Inter-American Educational Leadership Educational Leadership Network and principal investigator of research initiatives in Nicaragua and India. She is research codirector at the Center for the Study of Boys’ and Girls’ Lives.

Sarah Kavanagh (Q) is a research assistant professor. She was previously a postdoctoral scholar at the University of Washington, where she directed a program investigating innovative approaches to teacher mentoring.

Phil Sirinides (Q) is a research assistant professor. He was a senior researcher at the Center for Policy Research in Education and was instrumental in the development of Penn-syvania’s unified early childhood data system.

Alec Gershberg (Q) is a senior fellow in GSE’s Literacy, Culture, and International Education Division and a senior lecturer in sociology and urban studies in the School of Arts and Sciences. He most recently served as chair and associate professor of public and urban policy at The New School in New York City.
How can a great graduate school of education help to change the life trajectories of children in urban schools? A passion for answering that question drew Dean Pam Grossman to Penn GSE, a school with the expertise and desire, along with a critical location, to transform lives through education.

“Philadelphia has long had one of the highest child poverty rates among the nation’s largest cities,” says Dr. Grossman. “And the number of children in poverty has been growing nationally. By tackling this problem here, we are developing models that can be used across the country.”

Grossman is taking Penn GSE’s partnership with The School District of Philadelphia to the next level, building upon GSE’s longtime commitment to urban education and engagement with the District. Employing new approaches that amplify the reach of this work and allow GSE to join forces with other Penn schools, she views the partnership as a top priority in her vision for the School.

Building Upon a Legacy

For decades, Penn GSE has partnered with The School District of Philadelphia to improve the academic achievement and life outcomes of Philadelphia children and youth. Today that commitment includes 566 programs that Penn GSE students, faculty, and alumni conduct in 270 schools throughout the District.

The array of programs is wide—field placements of GSE students in teaching and counseling; professional development for District teachers; workshops in subjects like science, coding, and filmmaking for District students; research by GSE faculty to improve education; alumni working as teachers and leaders; and more, all summarized in an interactive map at https://phillymap.gse.upenn.edu.

Complementing this broad engagement, GSE leads two intensive, University-wide partnerships with individual K–8 schools in Penn’s local community of West Philadelphia—the Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander University of Pennsylvania Partnership School (Penn Alexander) and the Henry C. Lea School—providing a range of resources to the schools. With different histories and models of engagement, both partnerships illustrate Penn GSE’s commitment to developing new knowledge and approaches that increase opportunity for underserved children.

“Both partnerships are important to the University,” says Dr. Caroline L. Watts, director of school and community engagement and senior lecturer at Penn GSE. The Office of School and Community Engagement, recently established by Dean Grossman, is enhancing GSE’s systems and processes of working with the city.

“We are looking at what each model of partnership teaches us about university-assisted schools—what is sustainable and replicable, and which of our efforts make the most difference for students,” Watts says.

Penn Alexander opened in 2001 as the result of a historic partnership among Penn, The School District of Philadelphia, and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers to build a model university-assisted public school for West Philadelphia children. Since its opening, 80% of Penn Alexander students have made significant growth in reading and math.

The Henry C. Lea School, established in 2015, is a Responsive Education Services (RES) charter school that is nationally recognized for its innovative, student-centered approach to education. The partnership between the University of Pennsylvania and RES began with a shared vision to create a unique educational opportunity for children of color in West Philadelphia.

Penn GSE is committed to developing new knowledge and approaches that increase opportunity for underserved children. This commitment is reflected in the work of the partnerships, the Office of School and Community Engagement, and the broader community of Penn GSE faculty, students, and alumni. Together, we are partnering locally for national impact.
A brand-new, District-wide math curriculum puts an increased emphasis on mathematical reasoning and allowing students to find their own paths to the correct solution of a given problem.

establishment, Penn Alexander has earned a reputation as one of the top elementary schools in the city. The school was named a 2016 National Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education and was also dubbed a City Leader among K–8 schools on the District’s 2014-15 School Progress Report. GSE and Penn’s involvement in building the school from the ground up and providing a full-time onsite liaison represented an unprecedented step for a university.

The partnership with Lea, a neighborhood school established more than one hundred years ago, involves a different challenge. That of working with an existing school that operates within complex circumstances. Lea serves a student population that is predominantly low-income and includes substantial numbers of immigrant students, as well as students with special education needs. Having collaborated for decades with Lea, Penn deepened the partnership in 2013. It now includes a GSE-based liaison, doctoral student Rich Liu, ’04, working onsite. GSE alumna ShaVon Savage, GED ’02, in 2013. It now includes a GSE-based liaison, doctoral student Rich Liu, C’04, working onsite. GSE alumna ShaVon Savage, GED ’02, became principal at the start of the 2016-2017 year. The partnership with Lea, a neighborhood school established in 2013.

In 2014, GSE launched a District-wide mathematics improvement initiative. By working with schools throughout The School District of Philadelphia, including the Science Leadership Academy at Beeber (pictured right), Penn GSE is expanding upon its work in 270 schools throughout The School District of Philadelphia, including the Science Leadership Academy at Beeber (pictured right).

Having taught in the District for seventeen years, McLaughlin views the District’s mathematics initiatives and network-wide partnership with Penn GSE as significant steps forward. “This is the first time I’ve seen such a drive for math instruction,” she says. “It’s important that this work continues.” After implementing the new curriculum in her classroom, she was grateful to see her students’ progress.

By the end of the year, they were able to articulate their reasoning and their problem-solving strategies with such eloquence,” she says. “They saw that there are many ways to solve problems, which is a lesson that goes beyond math.”

Partnership Across Professions

For children facing adversity, education can offer a vital opportunity, especially when school is the most stable environment in their lives. For children facing adversity, education can offer a vital opportunity, especially when school is the most stable environment in their lives. However, many of the challenges that children in poverty encounter outside of school may affect their educational experiences. When children have been exposed to lead poisoning, suffer the trauma of homelessness, or have responsibilities for taking care of younger siblings, their attendance and performance at school will likely reflect these circumstances. Given these realities, how can education be responsive to the challenges that children face outside of the classroom?

Dean Grossman found a compelling answer when she and the deans of two other Penn schools joined the university in 2014-2015. Discovering a shared commitment to improving the health and well-being of children and families, Dean Grossman, Dean John L. Jackson of Penn Social Policy and Practice (SP2), and Dean Antonia Villaruel of Penn Nursing launched the Penn Futures Project to develop solutions at the intersection of their three professional fields.

“How can education be responsive to the challenges that children face outside of the classroom?”

During 2016-2017, Penn Futures funded a range of cross-school collaborations that brought together the professions of education, social work, and nursing, with further financial assistance from the Office of the Provost. One project used the power of linking administrative data across multiple government agencies to help the City
Penn GSE’s commitment to The School District of Philadelphia includes 586 programs conducted by GSE students, faculty, and alumni. This work is creating a national model of partnership between a graduate school of education and an urban school district, and represents a top priority in Dean Grossman’s vision.

“If we’re going to serve all the needs of the whole child—health, mental health, and academics—then we need to draw from all three fields to do that.”

Watts. “We want to move farther out into different parts of the city, to places where we can meet a need by integrating resources from GSE and Penn,” she says.

Led by Penn GSE Teacher Education Program Director Kate Kinney Grossman, the project brought nine Penn interns to KHSAS in 2016-2017. This included two students in GSE’s Teacher Education program, three in GSE’s Professional Counseling program, two in SP2’s Master of Social Work program, and two Penn Nursing undergraduates.

While field placements are an established part of the Penn programs, the work at KHSAS was unusual for bringing students from different Penn programs together to train at one site, with a new, shared curriculum.

“If we’re going to serve all the needs of the whole child—heath, mental health, and academics—then we need to draw from all three fields to do that,” says Kinney Grossman. “For me it was an opportunity to rethink how we’re preparing teachers for high-needs contexts.”

One of the most significant outcomes of the year for KHSAS was the dramatic increase in the number of counselors and social workers available to the high school students. Without the Penn interns, GSE alumni and full-time KHSAS school counselor Diana Finesmith, GED’16, would have served the student body of 450 alone. With the addition of the three students from GSE’s Professional Counseling program and two from SP2’s Master of Social Work program, the student-counselor ratio lowered to 75:1, a figure unheard of in most urban schools.

“The challenges we’re working with at Kensington are very intense,” says Finesmith. “Our student population faces a variety of issues, from trauma and abuse, to grief and loss, to mental and behavioral health concerns.” With the five interns in place, her department was able to meet with three hundred students during the year.

This included ongoing work with over ninety students.

“We’ve really been able to create a culture and environment where students feel safe and comfortable enough to come and talk with us,” says Finesmith. “Counseling and mental health still often hold a stigma, and we’ve been able to begin to break down that barrier and give students a level of consistent emotional support that they might not otherwise have in their lives.”

Penn faculty from the three schools took turns leading group discussions for all of the Penn interns, considering KHSAS students’ challenges through the perspective of all three fields.

“Allowing future nurses to learn in this way, alongside other professions, will give us richer professionals, those who can think critically and solve problems,” says Monica Harmon, senior lecturer, MSN, MPH, BSN, who oversees the project for Penn Nursing during the 2016-2017 school year.

“For the first time, social work students could have professors from GSE and Nursing impact their fieldwork learning on a regular basis,” adds Anne Weiss, MSW, LSW, director of field education, who managed the project for SP2.

Another facet of the project involves professional development for KHSAS teachers offered by students in GSE’s Ed.D. in Educational Leadership program and Penn Nursing. That effort, and all of the Penn Futures work at KHSAS, embraces a “trauma-informed” approach meant to increase awareness across the school of the challenges students face outside of the building. Before deciding to discipline a student who acts out or breaks a rule, for example, adults in the school are encouraged to try a dialogue with the student to learn what is behind the problematic behavior, or consider sending the student to a counselor.

“The idea is that everybody in the school should approach students with the understanding that they may have experienced something that is causing them anger or sadness or frustration in their life,” says Nimet Eren, GED’09, principal of KHSAS beginning in 2017-2018. A GSE alumna and current doctoral student, Eren has been a part of the GSE community throughout her eleven years as a Philadelphia educator, participating in the Philadelphia Writing Project and working with master’s students after receiving her degree.

The project will continue in 2017-2018, and KHSAS has begun the year with a total of six GSE and Penn alumni on staff—Eren and

Penn GSE’s commitment to The School District of Philadelphia includes 586 programs conducted by GSE students, faculty, and alumni. This work is creating a national model of partnership between a graduate school of education and an urban school district, and represents a top priority in Dean Grossman’s vision.

Looking Ahead
As Penn GSE deepens the partnership with Neighborhood Network 2 and Penn Futures supports a variety of projects—including one led by Watts to develop a cross-school certificate program at Penn in child welfare—the horizons of GSE’s work in Philadelphia continue to broaden.

A Penn Futures conference on parenting and early childhood brought together researchers, practitioners, and city officials in June. A new grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has established a Calvin Bland Faculty Fellowship in each Penn Futures school to support research on improving the lives of at-risk young men and boys of color and their families. (See page 4 to learn more about the conference and fellowships.)

Most importantly, Penn GSE is committed to work of broad practical importance. “In a knowledge economy, our country cannot afford to leave children behind,” says Grossman. “Penn GSE is having an enormous impact not only through the work of our students and faculty, but also through the graduates we produce each year who go on to influence the nation and world as educators and leaders.”
SHAPING THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

Penn GSE Produces College Presidents
by Lini S. Kadaba

HAVING PRODUCED FORTY-FIVE COLLEGE PRESIDENTS as well as other top higher education leaders, Penn GSE’s nationally ranked Higher Education Division and its Executive Doctorate in Higher Education Management program play a significant role in the nation and beyond. Here, FIVE ALUMNI who have gone on to the top position at a college or university share their professional paths, accomplishments, and perspectives. Representing PUBLIC, PRIVATE, VIRTUAL, INTERNATIONAL, and MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTIONS, these alumni reveal varied career routes and a shared commitment to excellence and opportunity in higher education.

INCREASING COLLEGE ACCESS

D riving inspiration from his hero, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, Gregory J. Vincent, GRD’04, began his career as a civil rights attorney and an assistant attorney general of Ohio. Now, as the new president of Hobart and William Smith Colleges, a private liberal arts college in Geneva, New York, he continues a lifelong focus on diversity and opportunity. It was in 1995 that he turned his passion for civil rights toward education. “I realized that I had benefited from access to college, as had my parents,” says Vincent, the 2016 recipient of the Penn GSE Alumni Association’s Educator of the Year Award. As assistant vice chancellor of academic affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he worked to improve the institution’s ability to enroll qualified students from a range of socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. He continued in this vein as vice provost of academic affairs and campus diversity and a professor of law at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.

While there, Vincent enrolled in the Executive Doctorate program at Penn GSE, conducting research on community-university partnerships that resulted in a law review article. “It made a strong on-the-job experience even stronger,” he says of the program, “because it connected the theoretical and the practical, and being around smart classmates and faculty helped you to think through issues.”

After a stint at the University of Oregon, Vincent moved in 2005 to the University of Texas at Austin, where he rose to vice president and was named the W.K. Kellogg Professor of Community College Leadership and Professor of Law. It was, he says, his destination school. Vincent earned a reputation for raising funds—$23 million over eight years—and aligning the budget with the university’s priorities. But when his undergraduate alma mater, Hobart and William Smith (HWS), came calling, Vincent couldn’t resist.

In July of this year, Vincent became the first HWS alumnus to serve as president. Working for the first time at a private college rather than a state university, he says his number one issue remains access: “Can students, can families afford a Hobart and William Smith education?” he asks. “Our country needs to invest more in higher education. Higher education, in turn, needs to be more effective and efficient. As a proud alumnus, I know firsthand the transformative power of an HWS education, and I want to make that a reality for future generations,” he says.

Headshots courtesy of Hobart and William Smith Colleges, University of Alaska, Huston-Tillotson University, American Public Education Inc., and Universidad Latinoamericana de Ciencias y Tecnología

Gregory J. Vincent
GRD’04
ADVANCING HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Colette Pierce Burnette, GRD'15, left a lucrative career in engineering to find a purpose in higher education. As president of Huston-Tillotson University in Austin, Texas, she is committed to the purpose of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in American education. “The mission of HBCUs is more important than ever,” says Pierce Burnette, the first female president and CEO of Huston-Tillotson since the previously separate Samuel Huston and Tillotson colleges merged in 1952, and the second female president in the institutions’ 140-year history. “HBCUs give a purpose for underrepresented students,” she says. In the Executive Doctorate program at Penn GSE, Pierce Burnette says she learned hard work and dedication. “I was always looking for the next challenge to accomplish,” she says. As president, Pierce Burnette has worked to build community on campus and partnerships with the surrounding city of Austin. She has also grown Huston-Tillotson’s adult degree program, which includes tracks in business administration, education, liberal arts, psychology, and criminal justice. “It is designed for working adults whose access to higher education may be otherwise limited due to personal, financial, and professional responsibilities,” she says. That kind of opportunity is at the heart of HBCUs, she notes. “Colleges give people choices,” she says. “HBCUs are an investment in the future.”

In addition, Alaska suffers a large educational attainment gap. Johnson says a quarter of the jobs in the state require a bachelor's degree, and 40 percent an associate's or certificate. “The state is producing about fifteen percent of those,” he says. “We import our talent. For example, the majority of the state’s K-12 teachers come from outside of Alaska.” Johnson rose to the top of his Strategic Pathways initiative, which grew out of his research at Penn GSE. “I developed a set of habits and ways of analyzing the issues leaders encounter,” Johnson says of his experience in the Executive Doctorate program. “I really wanted to enable myself to be effective if one day I was going to be president.”

Through Strategic Pathways, Johnson has brought together faculty, staff, and community members to identify ways to improve all aspects of UA—with less money. He is now implementing some of the hundreds of suggestions generated, working to consolidate procurement offices across campuses and schools, cut or suspend fifty degree programs, and reduce employees. Future phases will focus on online learning and partnerships with community colleges. It was bumpy at first,” he says of the implementation. “I learned more about leadership. I go back to some of the readings I did at Penn GSE to ground myself and even find solace as I deal with these challenges.”

PREPARING LEADERS TO SERVE THE WORLD

When Silvia Castro, GRD’10, graduated from Georgetown University in 2001, she returned to her native Costa Rica, her career took off. After just six months as international office director at Universidad Latinoamericana de Ciencia y Tecnología (ULACIT), a private, bilingual university in San José focused on science and technology, she became the university’s student affairs director, supervising job placement, financial aid, and counseling professionals. She continued to rise quickly to academic vice president, and earned a master’s in school leadership from Universidad Francisco de Vitoria in Madrid. In 2000, Castro became president of ULACIT. She was twenty-eight years old and just five years out of college. “I would basically train people and move on,” says Castro, who grew up in a family of educators. “I organize. I fix it, and it works on its own.” Seeking to step back and gain perspective on her field, Castro came to the Executive Doctorate program at Penn GSE after earning a master’s in education from Harvard. “I had done management, but I didn’t understand it theoretically,” she says. Her thesis at Penn GSE, Castro says, was the first data-driven look at Costa Rica’s higher education system. Unlike in the United States, Costa Rica’s public institutions are generally managed by private-run universities. Her study concluded that public universities primarily served the wealthy, while private institutions served the poorest, often without the financial capacity to fulfill appropriate standards of educational quality.

Castro says the format of the Executive Doctorate program—designed to fit the schedules of working professionals—served her and her classmates well. “Penn GSE didn’t sacrifice quality for format,” she says. “I have a lot of faith in the nontraditional.”
Faces of Philanthropy
by Karen Doss Bowman

Through their generosity, donors to Penn GSE make a difference by investing in the School’s extraordinary people, programs, and partnerships. Penn GSE students and faculty strive every day to improve the world through education, and donors share that vision of education as a vital ingredient for a stronger society. Here are three stories about people supporting the mission of Penn GSE:

“Faculty support is among our highest priorities at Penn GSE.”

Professors on the faculty at Penn GSE are preeminent scholars in the field of education, contributing groundbreaking research and practice that direct the national conversation about education. Thanks to the generosity of multiple friends of the School, these distinguished scholars will be supported by four new professorships established since 2016 through a total of $7.5 million in faculty aid.

“Faculty support is among our highest priorities at Penn GSE,” says Dean Pam Grossman. “Our faculty provide cutting-edge policy guidance through their research, play an outsized role in the leadership of national professional organizations, and partner with teachers and schools to improve education. Perhaps most importantly, they produce Penn GSE alumni—the next generation of transformative educators and leaders.”

These of the new GSE professorships received matching funds from the University as part of a bold plan to create new endowed professorships under President Gutmann’s Penn Compact 2020 vision. Former Penn GSE Board of Overseers member Lori A. Milken, GED’72, and Michael Milken, WC’70, created the Lori and Michael Milken President’s Distinguished Professorship. Penn GSE Board of Overseers member and former chair Joel M. Greenblatt, W’79, WC’80, and the MMM Foundation established the MRMJ Presidential Professorship. Multiple donors contributed to a Graduate School of Education Presidential Professorship: current Board of Overseers chair David N. Roberts, W’84, and Deborah Roberts; Overseer Jeffrey S. McKibben, C’93, and Allison Bieber McKibben, C’94; and Overseer Gustave K. Lipman, W’94, and Karen M. Lipman, W’94, WC’98.

An even larger coalition of donors produced a Centennial Presidential Professorship: Overseer Joel M. Greenblatt, W’79, and the MMM Foundation; Overseer Edward M. Yorke, W’81; Overseer Andrea J. Pollack, C’83, LB’87, and Adam Usdan; the late Richard Charles Trimble; former Overseer John Katzman; Laura Bilodeau Overdeck, WC’95; and Overseer Gregory A. Milken, C’95, and El Milken.

“We are deeply grateful for this robust and inspiring support,” says Dr. Grossman. “It ensures that Penn GSE can continue to attract and retain an esteemed and internationally renowned faculty who are transforming education through their research and practice.”

Advancing the Teaching Profession

As an educator, Marjie Gittis Katz, GED’90, knows firsthand the influence teachers have on children as learners.

“Teachers play a vital role in launching the academic lives of the children in their classes,” says Katz, a new member of the Penn GSE Board of Overseers. “They can have a positive impact on the way a child’s whole educational career unfolds.”

Katz, who taught in elementary school for seven years, recalls her experience at Penn GSE as both practical and cutting edge. Her time spent engaged in scholarship was balanced with hands-on learning opportunities in a real classroom setting with young students.

“As a Penn GSE student, it was incredibly rewarding to work with a classroom for the whole year and to get the feeling of carrying a group of kids through and seeing their improvement,” Katz says. “The teacher education program at Penn GSE took a groundbreaking approach.”

Even though she’s no longer employed as a teacher, Katz has volunteered in numerous capacities at the independent school her three children have attended. A member of GSE’s Benchmark Society and a Fellow in the University’s Benjamin Franklin Society—both for her support of the GSE Annual Fund—Katz recently established the Marjie Gittis Katz Scholarship Fund at Penn GSE to support future educators.

“Teachers are in demand right now, but it’s a hard job that doesn’t offer big financial rewards,” Katz says. “It’s a job where you have to show why this can be a fulfilling career and what kind of social impact educators can provide. Scholarship support will keep Penn GSE at the forefront, attracting the best and brightest to teach the next generation.”

“Teachers play a vital role in launching the academic lives of the children in their classes.”

Bringing a Passion for Penn to GSE

Brett Barth, W’93, and his wife, Natalie, have a strong interest in expanding access to higher education to outstanding students with financial need.

A former Penn Fund Executive Board member, Barth says serving the University in that capacity broadened his view of what it takes to educate Penn students.

“Natalie and I felt that getting a high-quality education and having the opportunity to go to a first-class university was the great equalizer for our own lives,” says Barth, a new member of the Penn GSE Board of Overseers. “We feel that the most important factor to driving anyone’s success is gaining access to a high-quality education at every level. And Penn is the place that is near and dear to our hearts.”

That insight prompted the Barths to support Penn in multiple ways, most recently through GSE. One of Penn’s top priorities is to boost undergraduate financial aid, and Barth has been a leader in that effort as co-founder and chair of the Undergraduate Financial Aid Leadership Council, which strives to strengthen and expand resources for financial aid.

After supporting undergraduate scholarships for many years, we thought that there was more that we could do,” Barth says. “We looked at a number of different opportunities, but what we found at GSE was by far the best in terms of the breadth and excellence of its research and educational programs.”

Impressed with Penn GSE’s strengths in training teachers for the classroom, as well as the School’s broad engagement in innovative research and educational policy, the Barths have established the Brett H. and Natalie W. Barth Scholarship Fund at GSE for master’s students enrolled in the Teacher Education Program. They are proud of the difference that the School is making throughout the United States and beyond by producing educators and leaders.

“ar to a teaching degree and then receive a teaching salary is not an attractive monetary investment on the face of it,” says Barth, co-founder of wealth management firm BBR Partners LLC. “If you can attract people who really have a heart for an education career and are incredibly talented at it, then making their training affordable seems like a no-brainer.”

Marjie Gittis Katz, GED’90

Natalie Barth and Brett Barth, W’93
When middle school students struggle with math homework, will this affect their college prospects years later? How can massive open online courses (MOOCs) improve their completion rates? Penn GSE Associate Professor Ryan Baker aims to answer questions like these as director of the Penn Center for Learning Analytics (PCLA), working with a team to find factors in online and classroom learning that predict and promote success. Having joined Penn GSE in 2016 as a transplant from Teachers College, Columbia University, Dr. Baker established PCLA with generous support from the Office of the Provost at Penn, as well as federal funding. We sat down with him to learn more about how PCLA is working to improve learning and how he believes data can transform the education landscape.

How would you describe PCLA’s mission?
We use data to study how learning unfolds. We are trying to identify aspects of a student’s experience that predict long-term outcomes, so that these can be addressed early. For example, one of our projects has shown that if students exhibit boredom, confusion, careless behaviors, or other forms of disengagement during middle school mathematics, this affects not only their performance on standardized examinations at the end of the year, but also their college prospects several years later—whether they will go to college, whether it will be a selective college, and what they will major in when they get there. Findings like these can be used to develop more effective curricula and teaching approaches.

What kinds of learning environments do you study, and how?
We look at a variety of formats, including state-of-the-art online learning like MOOCs, traditional classroom instruction, and blended learning, where students use software in a classroom. It happens to be easier to collect data about online and blended contexts, but we are interested in learning across the board. We use a range of methods, from large-scale approaches like data mining to small-scale observational techniques.

Data mining means developing computer algorithms to find hidden patterns in large quantities of data. What does this make possible?
With traditional research methods, typically you can only ask one question at a time. With data mining, if you have enough data, you can ask ten thousand questions at a time. We have a large portfolio of data-mining projects. For one of them, Ph.D. student Juan Miguel Andres is analyzing over a hundred data sets about the MOOCs Penn offers for free to learners around the world through the Coursera and edX platforms. He is using the data to test fifteen previously published findings about MOOCs. Too often, studies about MOOCs take a narrow approach, drawing conclusions from the data on just one course. We want to see if the existing findings about things like the completion rates and benefits of MOOCs can really be generalized across multiple courses in different subjects for different populations, and data mining allows us to do that.

“If students exhibit boredom, confusion, careless behaviors, or other forms of disengagement during middle school mathematics, this affects not only their performance on standardized examinations at the end of the year, but also their college prospects several years later.”
What are some other highlights of your data-mining projects? Dr. Jaclyn Ocumpaugh, PCLA’s associate director, is working to identify in real time which courses in a classroom are engaging in behaviors that impact their learning. This could save field researchers time and money by giving them a better sense of where to focus when they observe a classroom. Ph.D. student Stefan Slater is working on a project that analyzes 160,000 math problems to determine which ones are most effective for students and why. For another key project, the Center has received a grant from the Office of Naval Research to determine which aspects of U.S. Navy training lead to better outcomes, such as a lower risk of accidents.

In addition to the U.S. Navy project, have you done other research on workplace training? Yes, when I was at Columbia we did a project studying the emotional reactions of military cadets training to be combat medics. The training content that the cadets go through is, frankly, very intense. Our findings identified ways to make the training more supportive, such as messages highlighting the trainees’ ability to succeed.

How can PCLAS’s findings be translated into better learning experiences for students? Largely, findings like ours can be taken up by various educational vendors—such as developers of online or print curricula. So, for example, a vendor that provides an algebra curriculum to a thousand schools could make use of our findings to improve their content so that students will learn more effectively. Or these companies can provide the information in a digestible fashion for faculty and administrators.

Last summer, you taught your MOOC “Big Data and Education” for the first time at Penn, having brought it from Columbia. What are some of the highlights of the course? It’s designed for people in graduate school and the workforce who want to learn the key methods of educational data mining and learning analytics. As far as I know, fewer than ten universities in the world teach these subjects, and many of them use my MOOC as their textbook. I’m excited about the ways we have continued to push the envelope for MOOC instruction and content. For this version of the course, we moved toward incorporating adaptive learning, using software that provides the content in a way that is tailored to each student’s individual needs. Adaptive learning is often pointed to as a way to improve education. How well do you think it is currently applied, and how do you view its potential? No currently existing system really reaches the full vision of adaptive learning—education that is sensitive to the full range of differences that students bring to bear, in which students receive individualized learning experiences that will most help them to grow. Some of the technology that is currently used to customize students’ learning in K-12 is pretty good, though it hasn’t cracked the problem entirely. K-12 education is ahead of other areas in implementing adaptive learning, but higher education is moving a lot faster and tends to be better equipped to evaluate evidence and adopt good products. Right now, some sustainable efforts for higher education are coming out of large publishers and learning technology companies.

Through support from the Office of the Provost, PCLA has a central location in the Van Pelt-Dietrich Library to foster its collaborative role at Penn. How does the Center collaborate? We have an important collaboration with the University’s Online Learning Initiative, which is located next to us in the library, to study the data from Penn’s MOOCs. Since joining Penn GSE, I’ve been talking with many others on campus about potential collaborations in areas such as computer science and writing, and I feel very positive about the collaborative possibilities at Penn. The Center also has research collaborations with the University of Michigan, the University of Illinois, Georgia State University, and Beijing Normal University in China, among many other places. Beyond my role at GSE and Penn, I see my job as one of building things that can do outreach from the University, so that people around the world can utilize Penn’s great research instruments.

New EAA President Seeks to Build Connections Among Alumni

by Susan Scerbo, GED’14, EAA Communications Committee Chair

Marsha Comegno, GED’98, GRD’04, wants to create new opportuni ties for Penn GSE alumni to stay connected with their alma mater. As the new president of the Education Alumni Association (EAA), she envisions rising engagement among graduates. Her goal for achieving that engagement is to develop meaningful pathways and programming for alumni.

“I want to get to know alumni and students,” says Comegno. “I want to learn about their journeys through graduate school and in the job market, and I want to be able to tap into their individual talents and experiences to help build connections.”

As she works to promote the interests of Penn GSE alumni, Comegno can draw upon years of experience matching people with opportunities, having worked in the admissions offices of Penn Law, her alma mater Gettysburg College, and Salem College, where she was associate dean of admissions. Today, she continues to help students and families navigate the college selection process as a college consultant through her own business, Journey Education Consulting.

All Penn GSE alumni become members of the EAA upon graduation. Comegno will begin her term as president by leading the EAA Board, the Association’s governing body, in a strategic planning process to identify the needs of Penn GSE alumni. The process will involve benchmarking with similar schools of education and direct outreach to alumni. “We need to take the pulse of our alumni and students,” she explains.

The EAA mission is to provide opportunities for continued advancement, professional growth, networking, and sharing of expertise among alumni. Comegno envisions the Board focusing this year on partnerships for professional development, working in collaboration with Penn GSE’s new director of career and professional development and the School’s Office of Development and Alumni Relations. Another priority for Comegno will be to ensure that the alumni community’s voice is expressed by the EAA Board.

Comegno brings the perspective of an experienced alumni leader and higher education professional. She was instrumental in developing a strategic plan for Gettysburg College as president of its alumni association and continues to serve her undergraduate alma mater as a member of its board of trustees. Through her consultancy business, she is a regular visitor to many college and university campuses, and in 2016 she co-chaired the annual conference of the Higher Education Consultants Association, a professional organization that supports consultants across the nation.

Comegno believes that ensuring a vibrant future for an alumni community begins with fostering professional networking: “By increasing these connections among alumni, we’re going to give them a valuable lifelong relationship to the School,” says Comegno. “This is a model I have seen work very well on other campuses, and I know we can make it work here at Penn GSE.”

Visit www.gse.upenn.edu/alumni to learn more about Penn GSE alumni programming and the Education Alumni Association.
TRANSFORMING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The third year of the School Leadership Program is a time when students begin to dig deep into pedagogy and instructional practices, I was excited to dive into something that was going to be a challenge,” she says.

Christiansen was drawn to the eleven-month program’s design. SLP launched a decade ago with a cohort model that places student diversity at the core of learning. Students range from those with three to four years of experience to more seasoned mid-career professionals and hail from such divergent career paths as admissions, development, teaching, and consulting in the private sector. They are also geographically diverse; what started primarily as a local program has evolved into one with a national reach, as the combination of virtual and on-campus sessions has helped SLP attract students from across the country.

One of the most significant forms of diversity, however, is the way that SLP integrates students from private, public, and charter schools. Matriculants enroll in one of the program’s three tracks—Independent School, Public/Charter School, or Certification-Only. Students in the first two tracks expect to earn an M.S.Ed. in School Leadership as well as public-school principal certification, while those in the latter track pursue certification alone. Students in all three tracks learn together.

“It’s the only program I know of that has that mix,” says Earl Ball, SLP’s director and one of its architects. “We really believe that if we’re going to make progress in education, there has to be this discussion across sectors.”

She came to Penn GSE with the goal of enriching her perspective. “I wanted a deeper understanding of the broad topics around running an independent school,” she explains. That would mean venturing into areas beyond admissions, but Christiansen decided she wanted to push herself. “While I was, to be quite honest, a little scared about the deep dive into pedagogy and instructional practices, I was excited to delve into something that was going to be a challenge,” she says.

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“It’s the only program I know of that has that mix,” says Earl Ball, SLP’s director and one of its architects. “We really believe that if we’re going to make progress in education, there has to be this discussion across sectors,” he adds. “The siloed approach where the private school people don’t talk to the public school people and the charter school people are in the middle somewhere just doesn’t make sense. There’s a lot for people to learn from one another, and that’s something that we’re excited about. Good schooling is good schooling, regardless of the sector.”

Aaron Lucas, an English as a New Language teacher and coordinator at P.S. 33 Timothy Dwight School, a public school in the Bronx, is an SLP student in Christiansen’s cohort. His long-term career goal is to continue in public education as the principal of a dual-language elementary school. Attracted to the program’s geographically diverse mix of students, he says connecting with peers at public schools in other states has broadened his knowledge. “Public schools aren’t monolithic,” he notes. “Pennsylvania’s schools differ from New Jersey’s, for example.” He has also learned from his peers at private schools, gaining insight on approaches that have been adopted more widely in their institutions, such as project-based learning, a teaching method that emphasizes student-centered projects.

Administratively, SLP reflects the cross-sector philosophy as well. Ball, who served as the head of the private William Penn Charter School in Philadelphia for more than three decades, partners with co-director Priscilla Dawson, an expert on leadership in urban schools who spent thirty years as a leader in public schools pursuing school reform. “The mixture of students from the three sectors enhances the dialogue about quality education,” Dawson says of the cohort model. “Conversations recognize differences, but the focus is on how the school leader provides the vision and leadership to create caring learning environments that promote success for all students regardless of context.”

Over the course of the program, students develop that vision and leadership by participating in the rigorous weekend sessions, listening to expert speakers, collaborating on group projects, and observing practitioners in school settings. To further expose
“I look forward to continuing to grow and learn by reading the literature of education research and forming relationships with exceptional school leaders.”

School, an independent school in suburban Philadelphia. “He has helped guide my thinking; he has helped me when I wrestled with ideas or thoughts; he has been supportive at times when I’ve been uncertain about what I should do next,” she says. “I imagine that he will continue to be someone I can reach out to even after I graduate.”

Dawson notes, “We believe the mentors have an enormous impact on our students’ growth as leaders. Relationships commonly extend beyond the program and into the professional realm.”

As Christiansen and Lucas look ahead to their paths beyond the program, when they will join SLP’s community of alumni serving in leadership positions at hundreds of schools, they feel empowered to make their mark on the future of education.

“I’m passionate about admissions week, and I know that this program will help me contribute more deeply and more widely in my school and achieve my long-term goals of consulting and writing,” he says. “The program-assigned mentors, experienced education leaders, further prepare students for the realities of leadership roles. Students and mentors communicate weekly, and each mentor makes a visit to the mentee’s workplace to gain a firsthand understanding of the setting.”

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1940s

Jane Burke Lego, ED ’49, is retired and still appreciative of her Penn education. She has moved to her son’s home and looks forward to making new friends.

1960s

Bill Kautz, GED’61, is working on his autobiography. Before his retirement, he was an assistant professor at Penn-sylvania State University and worked as a bureau director of higher education for the State Department of Education.

1970s

Myrna Agnis, CW ’63, GED’73, GR’79, a financial advisor at Morgan Stanley in Houston, TX, gave a lecture on finance at the Menlo Regional Gathering in June.

Lois Kimmelman, GED’75, has founded the website Histscorecycle.com, which showcases historic building renovations that successfully integrate “green” elements.


Daniel P. Kraft, C’71, GED’71, is a pediatrician in Palm Beach County, FL, specializing in learning disabilities and behavioral pediatrics. Now retired, he volunteers at a bilingual elementary school and elsewhere.

Joan Poliner Shapiro, GED’71, GR’78, became an emeritus professor at Temple University’s College of Education in June. She was the keynote lecturer on ethical decision-making at a conference sponsored by Penn’s Excellence and Equity Center in July.

1980s

María Antonia Cowles, GED’87, having retired from Penn, has been conducting OPI language assessment in English and Portuguese for academe and the military, training language testers, and creating language evaluation materials for K-12 students.

Monica Bieniek Davis, C’81, GED’81, completed coursework in administrative leadership at St. Martin’s University. She is in her second year as principal of Holy Family School in Lacey, WA.

Elizabeth Flemming, C’83, GED’83, is in her thirty-fifth year teaching math at William Penn Charter School in Philadelphia, PA, where her daughter is now a student.

Peggy Haykal, C’87, GED’82, a lifelong swimmer, is a swim instructor at the Princeton Fitness and Wellness Center in Princeton, NJ.


James W. McGuire, C’82, GED’83, has retired as a high school social studies teacher after thirty-two wonderful years. He is now a full-time field representative for the New Jersey Education Association.


Allicia Pousada, O’78, GR’84, edited Being Bilingual in Borrinquen: Student Voices from the University of Puerto Rico (Cambridge Scholars’ Publishing, 2017). She is a professor at University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras.

Linda Spery, GED’85, is professor of educational and school psychology at Indiana State University, where she is in her seventh year as chairperson of the Department of Communication Disorders and Counseling, School, and Educational Psychology.

1990s

Cynthia Weill, GED’87, republished her bilingual series, First Concepts in Mexican Folk Art, as board books under Cinco Puntos Press of El Paso, TX, gaining a positive review in The New York Times.

Mona Sue Weissmark, GR’86, finished writing a textbook, The Sciences of Diversity, based upon a course she teaches as a professor at Harvard University.

Shelley B. Wepner, GED’73, GR’80, cohosted Challenges Facing Suburban Schools: Promising Responses to Changing Student Populations (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), and gave two presentations at the 2017 American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education Annual Meeting.

Eriko Yatabe-Waldock, GED’96, works with international students at the University of Colorado Boulder, managing an ESL program for au pairs and coordinating with Japanese universities.

1990s

Katherine (Kathy) Kaby Anselmi, G’91, GR’94, has returned to full-time teaching as associate clinical professor at Drew University after eight years as assistant dean of nursing.

Dave Davies, GED’96, enjoys living in Silicon Valley and helping St. Andrew’s Episcopal School through a transitional year as interim head of school.

Lisa Keasbey Herring, GED’93, an ESL teacher in the Pittsburgh public schools, received National Board Certification for English as a New Language: Early and Middle Childhood.

Jennifer S. Park, GED’98, assistant professor at Colorado Christian University, earned her Ph.D. in counselor education and supervision at Regent University in 2015.

Kristy Perry, GED’95, received tenure at Springfield Technical Community College in Springfield, MA, last year and became English department chair on July 1.

2000s

Richard Ables, C’00, GED’05, manages education activities in Ghana for the U.S. Agency for International Development, aiming to improve reading performance in public primary schools.

Michael Class, GED’04, a Jesuit priest, became executive director of Bellarmine Jesuit Retreat House in Barrington, IL, on July 1, after seventeen years on the faculty of Marquette University.

Angela Cleveland, GED’01, is a school counselor at Auten Road Intermediate School in Hillsborough, NJ. She was named the 2017 New Jersey School Counselor of the Year by the New Jersey School Counselors Association.

Sydney Hunt Coffin, GED’00, a teacher at Edison High School in Philadelphia, PA, was a guest on Radio Times with Marty Moss-Cohn on July 15 in an episode featuring one of his students.

Mary Robinson Cohen, L’81, GED’07, is superintendent and principal at Roosevelt Public School in Moomruck County, NJ, which welcomed Penn Pilgrim, great-grand daughter of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, as its 2017 commencement speaker.

Kelly Johnson Comly, GED’00, graduated from Neumann University in May with an Ed.D. in educational leadership. She married William F. Comly Jr. on January 21.

Delvin Dinkins, GRD’05, has joined the Pingry School in Basking Ridge, NJ, as assistant headmaster.

Chris Fariolo, GRD’04, is owner of the Philadelphia Institute for Individual, Relational, and Sex Therapy, which now has offices in Philadelphia and Media, PA.

Alexine Fleck, GED’95, GR’07, teaches at the Community College of Philadel- phia. In her spare time, she works with horses and fosters dogs, cats, and rabbits.

Laura Fried, GRD’05, became the eighteenth president of the Maine College of Art on July 1. The 135-year-old private college offers B.A., M.A.T., and M.F.A. degrees.

Jennifer Michelle Johnson, GED’08, joined Temple University in July 2017 as an assistant professor in the higher education program. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Maryland, College Park.

Tracey Ellen Kamens, GED’00, GRD’04, accepted a position as operations manager for PennPAC, an organization that helps solve nonprofit business challenges through the time and talent of Penn alumni volunteers.

Marco Krcatovich II, GED’07, director of institutional research and effective- ness at Governors State University, was elected a vice president as well as president-elect of Kappa Kappa Psi National Honorary Band Fraternity.

Paul Marthers, GRD’08, became vice provost for enrollment management at Temple University in July.

Yvette Denise Mayhur, G’80, GR’00, is principal of Tuk, with Ms. Blalp, a program aimed at breaking the cycle of illiteracy and improving the long-term health of babies born at Grady Hospital in Atlanta, GA.

Dale McCreedy, GED’86, GR’03, recently joined the Discovery Center in Murfreesboro, TN, as vice president of audience and community engagement after twenty-eight years at the Franklin Institute.

Erin Servillo, GRD’08, completed her first year as assistant superintendent of personnel in East Windsor School District in New Jersey.

Devon Skrritt, GED’05, is associate director for design and innovation pro- grams at Southern Methodist University, where he focuses on design thinking. He is also finishing his Ed.D.
Leigh M. (Gardner) Tolley, C’00, GED’02, is a tenure-track assistant professor of secondary education at the University of Louisville at Lafayette and chair of the Pre-K–12 Educational Evaluation, Evaluation, Topical Evaluation, and Group of the American Evaluation Association.

Dena Haritos Tsamitis, GRD’09, is director of the Information Networking Institute at Carnegie Mellon University. She was appointed to her position as director of college guidance at Temple University in fall 2018.

Brian Cuzzolina, LPS’08, GED’10, is the dean of the College of the Arts at The College of New Jersey.

Diane E. Eynon, GRD’10, was promoted to interim director of the Information Networking Institute at Carnegie Mellon University.

Michael Steven Williams, GRD’08, wrote in his research on Latino students and educational programming and research at the National University of Panama, and Bulgaria.

Jill Vizza, GED’10, was selected by the U.S. Department of State for a ten-month fellowship project teaching English to the Universidad Autonomía de Yucatán in Mérida, Mexico.

Vincent Leone, GED’16, accepted a position as associate managing principal, mobile response outreach and case management at Georgia Organics, where he will specialize in basic science and comparative education at UCLA’s Graduate School of Education and Information Studies.

Nicola Toliott Jefferson, GED’16, has been an admissions counselor for nearly a year at Yale-NUS College.

Payal J. Patel, GED’14, accepted a position as lead English teacher and assistant principal at a newly formed international school in Shenzhen, China.

Jasmine Phillips, GED’17, accepted a position as an assistant at the Arkansas School for Math, Science, and the Arts. She is also a volunteer at Great China International.

Callista Regis, GED’17, has accepted a teaching position with Uncommon Schools, her first in the United States. Previously a teacher overseas, she looks forward to preparing low-income students for college.

Anthony L. Rini, GRD’10, was promoted to senior vice provost for budget, planning, and administration at North-Eastern University after serving as vice provost for six years.

Christina Riso, GED’14, was appointed deputy chief of staff in the Office of the President at The College of New Jersey in May.

Elizabeth (Liz) Anne Schopper, C’13, GED’14, GED’15, received her New Jersey state license as an associate counselor in marriage and family therapy in March. She is a bilingual mobile response outreach and case manager at Robins Nest Inc. in Brunswick, GA.

Melissa K. Trotta, GRD’13, joined AIG as a manager in the executive search as associate managing principal in July. The company is an executive search firm focusing on higher education leadership.

Jill Vizza, GED’10, completed her Ed.D. in instructional administration at Temple University in August. Her research addressed single-subject acceleration in an elementary school setting.

Nicole (Ruxin) Wang, GED’11, a Ph.D. candidate at Pennsylvania State University, will pilot an online course this fall as part of her research on improving online learning.

Jayson Weingarten, C’12, GED’16, interned as a product manager at Workday this summer after completing his first year in the Wharton M.B.A. program.

Laura L. Williams, GED’16, accepted a position as an assistant at the Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, FL. She is a bilingual mobile response outreach and case manager at Robins Nest Inc. in Brunswick, GA.

Rachael Sklaro Lo, GDR’13, was appointed assistant professor of reading, literacy, and language at Villanova University, effective in August.

Diane Luckman, GED’11, was selected for the third consecutive year to present at the Progressive Education Conference. She is a teacher overseas, she looks forward to preparing low-income students for college.

Jill Vizza, GED’10, completed her Ed.D. in instructional administration at Temple University in August. Her research addressed single-subject acceleration in an elementary school setting.

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Marcus T. Wright, GED’14, wrote Paradox of the Learning Game: The Promise and Plight of Video Games and Learning (Design Meets Mind, LLC, 2017). He returned to Penn GSE this fall to pursue his Ed.D. in higher education.

Jiwei Yao, GED’16, is the founder of Buds, China’s first design and lifestyle media brand. She appears on the 2017 Forbes China 30 Under 30 list and is a global shaper at World Economic Forum.

Cong Zhang, GED’11, GED’12, obtained her Ph.D. in counseling psychology at Boston University and plans to begin work as a postdoctoral fellow in psychiatry at the Learning and Emotional Assessments Program at Massachusetts General Hospital.

Qinqin Zhao, GED’17, began working as a research analyst at Curriculum Associates, an edtech company headquartered in the greater Boston area, in July.

Zihui Zheng, GED’17, is an operations analyst at First Future, an online English education company.

CALLING ALL ALUMNI

We want to share news, initiatives, and opportunities that are relevant to you. To better connect our alumni community and learn about the impact of our graduates, Penn GSE is working with our trusted partners at Publishing Concepts (PCI) to create a comprehensive alumni directory.

Please call the dedicated, toll-free Penn GSE Alumni Directory verification line today to update your contact information. 866.647.8629

The data is used only for Penn GSE purposes and will not be sold or provided to a third party for any purpose that is not directly related to Penn GSE.
Commencement 2017

Penn GSE held its 103rd Commencement Ceremony on May 13 at the Palestra. Dr. Robert Parris Moses, a legendary civil rights activist and founder of the Algebra Project, gave the Commencement address. The ceremony also featured graduating student speaker Fatima Zaidi, GED'17. Penn GSE conferred 721 degrees during 2016-2017.

Want more advice for educators?
These tips are adapted from The Educator’s Playbook, a monthly Penn GSE newsletter that distills faculty research into useful advice for K-12 educators. Visit www.gse.upenn.edu/news/subscribe to sign up.

Keep it Local

Drawing from news and current events, find issues that have local relevance to your students and then use publicly available data to create related math lessons. Many CBMP math lessons tap into students’ daily experiences living in Philadelphia. In one lesson, students find the difference between the amount of sugar listed per serving on a label and the total amount of sugar in the bottle, learning to make healthier choices and gaining insight relevant to the city’s new tax on sugary drinks. Other local lessons address how to calculate travel times and distances for trolley routes and navigate the grid system of the Center City map.

Connect with Colleagues

Find colleagues who share your interest in creating relevant math lessons that benefit your local community. Brainstorm the topics and the mathematics together, swap ideas for modifying lessons, and share your classroom experiences. The CBMP website is more than a place for educators to download lesson plans and resources; it is also a free and open professional learning community. Every lesson includes a discussion forum where educators can connect to discuss their work. Collaboration is key to the creative process and can help you accomplish your goals.
Across the country and around the world, education offers the promise of knowledge, skills, growth, and something more—a vital path forward for individuals and societies.

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