

Leadership Academy

Leadership Conference 2026

July 6 – 8, 2026

Welcome to the Leadership Conference, the culminating experience for the Leadership Academy 2025 cohort. The conference is held in Bowman and Murdock Halls on MCLA's campus in North Adams, and remote access is available for each session.

Julie Haagenon, ACC of [New Pathways](#) will open the conference with a keynote presentation on Monday July 6th, from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. in Murdock Hall, Room 218. Additional keynote presentations include **Dr. Robert Putnam** the evening of July 7th, and morning presentations by [Dr. Leslie Blake-Davis](#) on July 7th, and [Dr. Matthew Bishop](#) on July 8th.

Concurrent conference sessions run on **Tuesday July 7th and Wednesday July 8th** from 10:00 a.m. until 3:45 p.m. and are presented by members of the Leadership Academy 2025 cohort on topics ranging from leading vibrant, inclusive schools to implementing instructional programs that enhance success for all. Sessions are organized according to the four standards established by MA DESE's *Professional Standards for Administrator Leadership* (PSAL):

- Instructional Leadership
- Management and Operations
- Family and Community Engagement
- Professional Culture

In this conference program you'll find:

1. Session schedule and links (pp. 1-2)
2. Session descriptions (pp. 3-7),
3. Cohort Presenter Bios (pp. 8-13)
4. Resources (pp. 14-15)

Thank you to the Leadership Academy 2025 cohort for their engagement, tenacity, and professionalism throughout this past year.

Thank you to all educators.
Thank you to all students.

Marianne R. Young
Leadership Academy Director



[Register](#)



MCL

Monday July 6, 2026 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.: Keynote Address Julie Haagenon, <i>New Pathways</i> Murdock 218 Link: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82277905214		
Tuesday July 7, 2026 9:00 – 9:45 Thoughts to Start the Day: Dr. Leslie Blake-Davis Bowman 122 Link: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82277905214 Meeting ID: 822 7790 5214		
Time	Bowman Hall Room 201	Bowman Hall Room 202
10:00 – 11:00	Service Learning in Action: Connecting Curriculum, Character, and Community Erika Stuff https://meet.google.com/sre-kafc-cci	PD vs. PLC: Moving from Professional Development to Professional Learning Communities Seneka Mitchell https://meet.google.com/icc-uojoy-hpj
11:15 – 12:15	The Modern-Day One-Room School House; Leveraging Mixed-Age Learning to Build a Meaningful School Culture Emily Reiver, Jake Walkup https://us05web.zoom.us/j/4099073826?pwd=NDRqa2lrQ3VsZzhmTEEzZDdmQUU2QT09	Reigniting Joy & Fostering a Healthy School Culture Lori Cornwell https://meet.google.com/eyb-ejzg-kwh
12:15 – 1:15	Lunch	Lunch
1:30 – 2:30	Understanding Neurodivergence: Building Neuroaffirming Classrooms Through Everyday Practice Laura Forte https://calendar.app.google/R72tPo7EsL9HUpwP7	Moving from Compliance to Buy-In During School Change Krystle Auricchio https://meet.google.com/mkn-ncip-nvg
2:45 – 3:45	More Than a Meeting: How Manifestation Determinations Shape Student Trajectories Nicole Cast https://meet.google.com/iep-nzqf-wmi	How to Improve Safety in Unsupervised Areas Throughout Your School Building David Fendrich, Michael Morrissey https://meet.google.com/fxc-qxsx-wxq
6:30 – 8:30	Keynote Address Dr. Robert Putnam, <i>The Music of Leadership</i>	Murdock 218 Link: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82277905214

Wednesday July 8, 2026

9:00 – 9:45 Thoughts to Start the Day: Dr. Matthew Bishop
Bowman 122

Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82277905214>

Meeting ID: 822 7790 5214

Time	Bowman Hall Room 201	Bowman Hall Room 202
10:00 – 11:00	Engagement at a Distance: Providing Opportunities for Family Collaboration within Juvenile Justice Facilities Kristie Wikane https://meet.google.com/ywp-atvm-mbb	Equity in Action: Creating Inclusive and Alternative Graduation Pathways to Support Special Education and Multilingual Learners Meaghan Espinoza, Kerrin Scully https://zoom.us/j/96948140339?pwd=t7M9kT0aLc1FGPaZInoL7GPNIjtLfR.1
11:15– 12:15	Music Integration as a Pathway to Inclusive Learning Danielle Berkowitz, Cheryl Gelber https://meet.google.com/gnw-woar-evb	Seeing What We Don't See: Strengthening Trauma-Informed Practice in Schools Kathleen Sullivan https://meet.google.com/xik-idsy-ijqf
12:15 – 1:15	Lunch	Lunch
1:30 – 2:30	Leading Change Through Standards-Based Grading: Promoting Equity, Clarity, and Student Growth Ellen Pringle https://us05web.zoom.us/j/84643574202?pwd=WE0aaH0bJkvSWjDg1EyWXRnxWDdNML.1	Bridging Schools, Families, and Communities to Strengthen Support for Homeless Students Savine Roberts https://meet.google.com/qzo-wqyy-hdf
2:45 – 3:45	Molding Effective Teachers: Clear is Kind Vanessa Jioia https://meet.google.com/usj-excq-ebt	Movement Matters: How Physical Activity Drives Academic Success and School Culture Patrick Haggerty https://us04web.zoom.us/j/73425312489?pwd=vvhqdorREIObjgtj8csaqsLpIrlrZX.1

Session Descriptions

Tuesday July 7

9:00 – 9:45	Thoughts for the Day: Dr. Leslie Blake-Davis
10:00-11:00	<p>Service Learning in Action: Connecting Curriculum, Character, and Community Erika Stuff https://meet.google.com/sre-kafc-ccj Service learning is a powerful instructional approach that integrates academic and social-emotional learning while engaging students in meaningful action that benefits their communities. In this interactive professional development session, teachers and school leaders will explore how service learning can increase student engagement, deepen curriculum connections, and foster the development of character, leadership, and civic responsibility.</p>
10:00-11:00	<p>PD vs. PLC: Moving from Professional Development to Professional Learning Communities Seneka Mitchell https://meet.google.com/icc-uojoy-hpj Professional Development (PD) and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are sometimes used synonymously, but they are different. This interactive session will highlight the similarities and differences between traditional professional development and effective PLCs, and how job-embedded, collaborative learning can lead to ongoing improvements in instruction and student achievement.</p>
11:15– 12:15	<p>The Modern-Day One-Room School House; Leveraging Mixed-Age Learning to Build a Meaningful School Culture Emily Reiver, Jake Walkup https://us05web.zoom.us/j/4099073826?pwd=NDRqa2lrQ3VsZzhmTEZzZDdmQUU2QT09 As kids enter society, they interact with colleagues and peers of different ages. People with different experiences, perspectives, values, interests, and concerns related to among other things, their stage and phase of life. Why do schools group students almost exclusively with other students of the same narrow age band? They don't have to. Mixed-age, mixed-grade classrooms connect students to peers who are not drastically different in age but may be in a very different stage of development. This session will explore the benefits and challenges of a mixed grade model and discuss how schools can leverage age diversity to build a meaningful school culture, while helping students foster the soft skills – teamwork, leadership, etc. – necessary to thrive in an ever-changing technological world.</p>
11:15– 12:15	<p>Reigniting Joy & Fostering a Healthy School Culture Lori Cornwell https://meet.google.com/eyb-ejzg-kwh This professional development session empowers educators to reignite their passion for teaching and cultivate a resilient and positive school environment. This session combines collaborative discussions with actionable strategies to reduce burnout, build peer trust, and place collective well-being at the heart of daily school culture. The primary goal of this session is to intentionally center joy as a foundational element of our school culture, rather than a byproduct of it. By actively cultivating joy in our daily practices, we restore the purpose, connection, and energy that fuel impactful teaching and sustained educator well-being.</p>
12:15– 1:15	Lunch

<p>1:30 – 2:30</p>	<p>Understanding Neurodivergence: Building Neuroaffirming Classrooms Through Everyday Practice Laura Forte https://calendar.app.google/R72tPo7EsL9HUpwP7 What is neurodivergence? Utilizing the Neurodiversity Paradigm, we will explore what exactly it means to be neuroaffirming, and how we can embrace this mindset with everyday classroom practices and Tier 1 interventions. Participants will explore the above-mentioned ideas and concepts of neuroaffirming care through the introduction of topics of: -Curiosity, Connection and Competency over Compliance.</p>
<p>1:30 – 2:30</p>	<p>Moving from Compliance to Buy-In During School Change Krystle Auricchio https://meet.google.com/mkn-ncip-nvg School leaders are constantly asked to implement new initiatives, programs, and systems, yet many efforts struggle to move beyond surface-level compliance. This session explores practical leadership strategies for building authentic staff buy-in during school change. Using Knoster’s “Model for Managing Complex Change” as a framework, participants will examine how vision, skills, incentives, resources, and action planning influence implementation and staff engagement. Through reflection activities, real-world school scenarios, and collaborative discussion, participants will identify barriers within the change process and explore leadership strategies that foster meaningful, sustainable improvement. Attendees will leave with practical tools and strategies to immediately strengthen implementation and staff engagement in their schools and districts.</p>
<p>2:45 – 3:45</p>	<p>More Than a Meeting: How Manifestation Determinations Shape Student Trajectories Nicole Cast https://meet.google.com/iep-nzqf-wmi Manifestation Determination Reviews (MDRs) are more than a legal requirement under IDEA, they are critical opportunities to make decisions that can significantly impact student outcomes. This session will explore the purpose and process of MDR meetings through the lens of effective leadership, equitable discipline practices, and data driven decision making. Participants will examine how disciplinary removals can contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline for students with disabilities and discuss how well-facilitated MDR meetings can serve as a safeguard against unnecessary exclusion from school. Special attention will be given to the role of school leaders in facilitating collaborative, legally sound, and student centered MDR meetings. By the end of the session, attendees will be able to identify the legal requirements and key components of an effective MDR meeting, analyze relevant student and discipline data to support informed decision-making, and apply leadership strategies that promote equitable outcomes for students with disabilities. Participants will leave with practical tools and resources that can be immediately implemented in their schools to strengthen the MDR process, improve decision-making, and better support students whose behaviors may be connected to their disabilities.</p>
<p>2:45 – 3:45</p>	<p>How to Improve Safety in Unsupervised Areas Throughout Your School Building David Fendrich, Michael Morrissey https://meet.google.com/fxc-qxsx-wxq <i>How to Improve Safety in Unsupervised Areas Throughout Your School Building</i> explores proactive strategies schools can implement to increase student safety, accountability, and supervision in areas such as hallways, locker rooms, cafeterias, buses, and transition spaces. This presentation focuses on building-wide systems, staff collaboration, student relationships, and data-informed decision-making to create a safer and more positive school environment for all students.</p>

Wednesday July 8th	
9:00 – 9:45	Thoughts for the Day: Matthew Bishop
10:00 – 11:00	<p>Engagement at a Distance: Providing Opportunities for Family Collaboration within Juvenile Justice Facilities Kristie Wikane https://meet.google.com/ywp-atvm-mbb</p> <p>Oftentimes, parents of youths involved in the juvenile justice system have no idea what their child's educational program or progress looks like. By inviting families into conversations about their child's education, not only can relationships be forged and strengthened, but parents will become empowered with knowledge about their child. While juvenile justice facilities cannot offer the same services for parents as traditional schools, there are many opportunities for engaging and involving families in their child's education. This session will address the opportunities that appear when parents are brought into the conversation.</p>
10:00 – 11:00	<p>Equity in Action: Creating Inclusive and Alternative Graduation Pathways to Support Special Education and Multilingual Learners Meaghan Espinoza, Kerrin Scully https://zoom.us/j/96948140339?pwd=t7M9kT0aLc1FGPaZlnoL7GPNijtLFR.1</p> <p>In this 60-minute session, audience members will learn how school and district leaders can design state-approved, equitable, inclusive, and flexible graduation pathways that dismantle systemic barriers and expand opportunities for Special Education and Multilingual Learners while maintaining high expectations for achievement and career readiness.</p>
11:15 – 12:15	<p>Music Integration as a Pathway to Inclusive Learning Danielle Berkowitz, Cheryl Gelber https://meet.google.com/gnw-woar-evb</p> <p>This session explores the powerful role of intentional music integration in student engagement and learning. Participants will examine how active engagement with music can enhance brain development, increase motivation and attention, improve memory retention, and strengthen executive functioning skills. The session also connects music integration to the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, as music can create varied pathways to learning, making content more accessible and meeting diverse student needs. Practical strategies for intentionally integrating music into classrooms across content areas will be explored. Educators will leave with actionable ideas, resources, and a renewed perspective on how music can transform teaching and learning by creating more engaging, meaningful, and inclusive learning experiences for all students.</p>
11:15 – 12:15	<p>Seeing What We Don't See: Strengthening Trauma-Informed Practice in Schools Kathleen Sullivan https://meet.google.com/xik-jdsy-iaf</p> <p>Trauma-informed education begins with self-awareness. In this session, educators will examine how their perceptions, assumptions, and communication styles influence how they interpret and respond to student behavior, including how “blind spots” can impact relationships, discipline decisions, and classroom climate. Through reflection, collaboration, and real-world scenarios, participants will explore how student stress responses are often misinterpreted as defiance or disengagement and practice shifting toward curiosity-driven responses that support regulation, connection, and trust-building. Educators will leave with practical strategies to strengthen self-awareness, improve relationships, and respond to student behavior with greater empathy and intentionality.</p>
12:15 – 1:15	Lunch

<p>1:30 – 2:30</p>	<p>Leading Change Through Standards-Based Grading: Promoting Equity, Clarity, and Student Growth Ellen Pringle https://us05web.zoom.us/j/84643574202?pwd=WE0aaH0bJkvSWjDg1EyWXRnxWDdNML.1 Standards-Based Grading (SBG) is more than a grading reform—it is a shift in how schools define, communicate, and support student learning. As schools seek to promote equity, increase transparency, and ensure grades accurately reflect academic achievement, educational leaders play a critical role in guiding this change. This session will explore the leadership practices necessary to successfully implement Standards-Based Grading at the secondary level. Meaningful change requires more than new policies and procedures—it requires trust, collaboration, and a shared commitment to students. Participants will explore the process of implementing Standards-Based Grading, including the development of a collaborative task force, prioritized standards, grading and reporting tools, family outreach efforts, and strategies for addressing stakeholder concerns. The session will highlight how educational leaders can bring people together around a common vision and support a culture where grades communicate learning, growth, and achievement. Through discussion, examples, and ready-to-use resources, attendees will leave with a clearer understanding of how educational leadership can support the transition to Standards-Based Grading while promoting equity, clarity, and student success.</p>
<p>1:30 – 2:30</p>	<p>Bridging Schools, Families, and Communities to Strengthen Support for Homeless Students Savine Roberts https://meet.google.com/qzo-wqyy-hdf This session highlights how schools, families, and community partners can collaborate to strengthen support for students experiencing homelessness through trust-building, clear communication, and coordinated engagement. Participants will explore practical fundraising ideas and a confidential PTSA Equity Fund model that help reduce barriers and expand resources for students in need.</p>
<p>2:45 – 3:45</p>	<p>Molding Effective Teachers: Clear is Kind Vanessa Jioia https://meet.google.com/usj-excq-ebt This session describes what effective teaching actually looks like and how administrators can leverage teamwork and collaboration by telling the truth in a way that keeps the teacher's dignity intact while fostering and building effective and highly effective teachers for our students. This delicate balance of constructive criticism, building relationships, and skilled leadership is hard work, but being clear with expectations is the kindest approach one can take. "We can do hard things." - Glennon Doyle</p>
<p>2:45 – 3:45</p>	<p>Movement Matters: How Physical Activity Drives Academic Success and School Culture Patrick Haggerty https://us04web.zoom.us/j/73425312489?pwd=vvhqdorREIObjgtj8csaqsLpjPlrZX.1 This presentation will examine the connection between physical activity, student wellness, academic achievement, and school culture through the lens of educational leadership. Drawing on my 15 years of experience as a physical education teacher and coach, I will explore how movement and athletics can serve as powerful tools for improving student engagement, mental health, leadership development, and overall school success. Topics will include the impact of exercise on brain function and learning, the relationship between movement and student mental health, and how athletics contribute to leadership skills, resilience, accountability, and school connectedness. The presentation will also examine how administrators can support wellness initiatives through scheduling, programming, and school culture development. The goal of the presentation is to demonstrate how physical activity and wellness initiatives are not simply extracurricular concerns, but essential components of effective school leadership and student success.</p>

Presenter Bios

Krystle Auricchio is a middle school educator and emerging educational leader at Troy Middle School with a strong focus on instructional leadership, collaborative school culture, and sustainable school improvement. With experience leading data-driven conversations, supporting PLC structures, and facilitating school-based initiatives, Krystle is passionate about helping educators move beyond surface-level compliance toward authentic engagement in the change process. Through her work at MCLA and school leadership experiences, Krystle has facilitated professional development, supported school-wide initiatives, led data discussions, and collaborated with staff and families to support student success. Her leadership approach emphasizes relationship building, collaboration, and building a school culture that supports meaningful and lasting improvement.

Dani Berkowitz joined Brooklyn Prospect High School in 2019 as a member of the Arts Department. Before joining Prospect Schools, she was the founding performing arts teacher at Uncommon Canarsie Middle School and worked professionally as an actor and AGMA union supernumerary. At Brooklyn Prospect, she has taught Choir, Musical Theater, Playwriting, and Acting, while also serving as Arts Department Head, Network Performing Arts International Baccalaureate Coordinator, and Director of Arts and Athletics. A native of Monmouth County, New Jersey, Dani graduated from Red Bank Regional High School, earned a BFA in Acting from Emerson College and an MAT from Relay Graduate School of Education. She has also completed professional development in Antiracist Theater Education, Technical Theater, Emerging Leaders, and Together Leadership. Dani believes every student deserves the opportunity to find their voice and that the performing arts build confidence, empathy, self-expression, and lifelong skills.

Nicole Cast joined the Berkshire Hills Regional School District in January 2020 as an intern and transitioned into a full-time position as a School Psychologist in August 2021. Originally from San Diego, California, and raised in Cornwall, New York, Nicole graduated from Cornwall Central High School before earning a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from SUNY Plattsburgh. She later obtained a Master of Science in Education and a Certificate of Advanced Study in School Psychology from The College of Saint Rose in Albany, New York. Her dedication to the field was recognized in October 2020 when she received the Ted Bernstein Award, an honor presented annually to one graduate student from each school psychology program in New York State. The award recognizes individuals who demonstrate exceptional commitment to improving the lives of children and families. She values collaboration, compassion, and creating environments where all students feel empowered to succeed.

Lori Cornwell is an 8th grade English teacher for Schenectady City School District. Lori has a decade of experience in education, instructing students in grades 7 through 10. She spent five years at the St. Anne Institute, a residential placement facility, at the start of her career before transitioning to her current role within a city public school. To support student de-escalation and the creation of trauma-informed learning spaces, she earned her Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Schools (TCIS) certification during the past year. Lori works as a member on the PBIS Committee and the Building Leadership Team working closely on improving school climate and implementing school incentives to help reduce student referrals and increase staff morale. When Lori is not teaching, she is logging miles and ran her first half-marathon race this past April.



Meaghan Espinoza is an impactful special education educator and transitioning school leader dedicated to building equitable, inclusive systems where all students thrive. With 13 years of classroom experience, Meaghan specializes in designing data-driven instruction, managing complex IEP compliance, and implementing supportive behavioral interventions.

Currently completing MCLA's Educational Leadership Program, Meaghan effectively bridges the gap between daily classroom realities and macro-level school administration. A proven collaborator, she excels at uniting general education staff, specialists, and families around shared student success goals. As an aspiring educational leader, Meaghan aims to mentor educators, shape inclusive policies, and foster a school culture rooted in equity, accessibility, and high expectations. Ultimately, she works to empower teachers and ensure systemic support for every learner.

David Fendrich joined LaGrange Middle School in the Arlington Central School district in 2022 as a member of the health and physical education department. Prior to his tenure at LaGrange Middle School, Mr. Fendrich coached and taught physical education in Troy City School District from 2020-2022. Mr. Fendrich has worked with students in courses such as 6th grade health, 8th grade health, adapted physical education, and K-12 physical education. He currently coaches JV baseball and JV football at Arlington High School. Born and raised in LaGrangeville, NY Mr. Fendrich attended Arlington High School, earned his Bachelor of Science degree at SUNY Brockport in physical education with a concentration in adapted physical education. He holds a Master of Science in Education. Mr. Fendrich continues his education through the New York State Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance. He is currently enrolled in the MCLA Leadership Academy, where he will attain his School Building Leader (SBL) Initial certificate in New York State by August of 2026. He is the recipient of the SUNY Brockport 2019 Campus Recreation Leader of the Year Award and the SHAPE America 2020 Major of the Year Award. He is a member of the Shared Decision-Making Committee at LaGrange Middle School and has volunteered every year with the Arlington Athletics Young Admiral programs. He enjoys spending his free time with his wife Sophia and son John-Donald. Mr. Fendrich believes in the power of having a growth mindset and the importance of leading people to be confident individuals. He values the quote, "A good leader inspires people to have confidence in the leader. A great leader inspires people to have confidence in themselves." - Eleanor Roosevelt

Laura Forte is a Licensed Master Social Worker, Certified School Social Worker, and aspiring school leader. With over 15 years in the human services field, Laura has specialized in working with Autistic and Neurodivergent learners, students experiencing trauma and intense mental health difficulties, and supporting school faculty in how to best connect and engage with learners with complex needs. Laura is currently a School Social Worker at Ulster BOCES. She has supported K-12 Special Education programs, and the Instructional Services department supporting school districts as a professional development facilitator, providing staff coaching in intense behavior support, classroom management systems, and Social Emotional Learning. Prior to entering the field of school social work, Laura worked in the nonprofit sector for several years in various roles as a human services generalist and Direct Support Professional. Laura's other areas of expertise include social emotional learning, wraparound model of care, executive functioning, connection to learning and regulation, restorative practices and mediation, authentic parent and family peer support, trauma informed care/developmental trauma, attachment disorders.



Cheryl Gelber joined the Division of Early Childhood Education at New York City Public Schools in 2022 as an Inclusion Specialist, where she supports systemwide inclusive practices across 3K and Pre-K programs through professional learning and technical assistance. With more than 20 years of experience serving young children with special needs in New York City, she has worked as a preschool teacher, early childhood special education teacher, supervisor, and director. Cheryl holds a bachelor's degree in Music Education from Syracuse University and a master's degree in Early Childhood Special Education from New York University. She has presented workshops for educators, agencies, and families across New York City and served as an adjunct instructor in Hunter College's Early Childhood Special Education master's program. The *Today Show Online* has interviewed Cheryl as an expert on how music stimulates a baby's brain. A passionate advocate for inclusion and the arts, Cheryl believes music and creative expression are powerful tools for access, participation, and learning.

Patrick Haggerty is a dedicated educator and aspiring school leader with over a decade of experience serving students in the Troy City School District. Since beginning his career in education in 2012, Patrick has worked as a Physical Education teacher, coach, and mentor, fostering student growth both inside and outside the classroom. His passion for education and commitment to student success have inspired him to pursue educational leadership, and he is currently completing his administrative certification through Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.

Throughout his career, Patrick has focused on building positive relationships, promoting student engagement, and creating inclusive learning environments where all students can thrive. His experiences in teaching, coaching, curriculum development, and school-wide initiatives have strengthened his belief that effective leadership is rooted in collaboration, integrity, and a commitment to continuous improvement. Outside of his professional responsibilities, Patrick is a proud father to two daughters, Madison and Sienna, who inspire him daily. He has been happily married to his wife, Nicole, since 2010, and together they value family, community involvement, and lifelong learning. As he continues his journey into educational leadership, Patrick remains committed to supporting students, staff, and families while helping schools achieve their highest potential.

Vanessa Jioia joined Port Richmond High School in September of 2019 as a member of the science department. Vanessa has worked with high school students with a range of abilities in every science course except Chemistry. Vanessa is also the softball and volleyball coach for her school, and works closely with administration, staff, community members, and families to provide the necessary resources to give her players a comparable experience to other wealthier school programs.

Vanessa was born and raised in Staten Island, New York and earned her bachelor's degree in Biology with a concentration in Education while earning her New York State Teacher's Certification in Biology Education 7-12 from the College of Staten Island. In 2021, she earned a master's degree in Secondary Education from The University of the People. Vanessa has continued her education beyond her master's degree, and she is currently pursuing a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study (CAGS) in Educational Leadership at MCLA. She enjoys planning school events, cooking and playing all games: physical, mental, strategy, etc.

Vanessa agrees with Glennon Doyle when she says, "We can do hard things." This quote represents the difficult experiences we have and the decisions we make in life that may require us to lean on each other. She believes that with guidance and teamwork, we can do anything.



Seneka Mitchell joined Thomas O’Brien Academy of Science and Technology in Fall 2023 as the K–5 English Language Arts Instructional Coach. She brings a diverse background in education, having served as a substitute teacher, teacher assistant, Center Director, Homeschool Coordinator, classroom teacher, and Instructional Coach. Throughout her career, she has supported students in English Language Arts and Writing while mentoring first-year, veteran, and special education teachers.

Born in the Bronx and raised in Rockland County, Ms. Mitchell graduated from North Rockland High School. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education (Pre-K–6) with a concentration in African American Studies from The College of Saint Rose and holds a master’s degree in Early Childhood Education. She continues her studies in educational leadership and actively participates in professional learning opportunities. A recipient of the Golden Apple Award in 2019, she serves on MTSS, BLT, and Equity Committees. She enjoys traveling, spending time with family and friends, and watching good series. Her favorite quote is, “Never be limited by other people’s limited imaginations.” — Mae Jemison

Michael Morrissey joined Sand Creek Middle School of the South Colonie Central School District in 2019 as a member of the mathematics department. Mr. Morrissey has taught students in Math 7, Math 7 Honors and Math 7 Lab courses as well as serving in the capacity of a Summer School Teacher and an instructor at the Cooperative Virtual Learning Academy (CVLA) through Capital Region BOCES since 2021. He also has been the Head Baseball Coach at Colonie High School since 2022.

Born and raised in Clifton Park, NY, Mr. Morrissey attended Shenendehowa High School, earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Mathematics Education at Siena College in 2019. He also holds a Master of Science degree in Curriculum Development and Instructional Technology from the University at Albany. Currently, he is enrolled in the MCLA Leadership Academy, where he will attain his School Building Leader (SBL) certificate in July 2026.

Mr. Morrissey is a member of the Shared-Decision Making Committee at Sand Creek and previously served on the Sand Creek Reopening Committee following the COVID-19 pandemic. He is a member of the Section II Baseball Committee and director of the Colonie Youth Skills Camp each summer. Outside of his roles in education, Mr. Morrissey enjoys spending time with family and friends, home improvement projects and vacationing.

Ellen Pringle is a veteran educator with more than 20 years of experience serving students across elementary, middle, high school, and college settings. She currently teaches English Language Arts at Downsville Central School District and serves as an adjunct instructor at SUNY Delhi. Ellen is completing the Leadership Academy for Administrative Licensure through Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and anticipates earning New York State School Building Leader certification in 2026.

Throughout her career, Ellen has championed initiatives focused on literacy, student voice, equitable grading practices, mentorship, and school culture. Her recent leadership work includes facilitating a district Standards-Based Grading initiative, developing a K–12 literacy culture plan, and supporting student-led service projects. Ellen believes that meaningful relationships, collaboration, and student-centered leadership are the foundation of successful schools.

Emily Reiver joined The Center School in the Fall of 2018 as a member of the teaching department, after teaching at PS. 084 the Lillian Weber School for 3 years. She has worked with students in academic courses such as Math, Science, Literature, and Writer’s Workshop. She also serves as academic advisor and a chorus and theater teacher.

Born and raised in Washington Heights, New York City, Emily attended Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts, earned her Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree at Tulane University in New

Orleans with a concentration in Sociology and Psychology. She holds a Master of Science in Education degree in Childhood Education Grades 1-6 from Hunter College. Emily continues her education through the program *Math for America*.

She enjoys traveling to foreign countries, musical theater, drawing, taking care of animals, and eating good food!

Savine Roberts is an educator and organizational leader with more than 10 years of experience in school culture, instructional practice, and career readiness programming. She is completing the School Building Leader program (July 2026) at MCLA, focusing on leadership strategies that strengthen restorative practices, student support systems, and equitable learning environments. A New York State Professional Teacher and Coordinator of Work Based Learning, Roberts teaches over 200 high school students annually, delivering real world business instruction and leading initiatives that enhance wellness, engagement, and positive school culture. Roberts' earlier career—spanning more than 20 years directing large scale readiness, training, and support operations for government programs—developed her expertise in team leadership, crisis response, and complex program management. She remains active in the New York State Association for Career and Technical Education, Business Teacher Association of NYS, Career Readiness Educators Association, and as an advisor with Future Business Leaders of America, the PTSA, and youth athletics.

Kerrin Scully is a professional, enthusiastic, compassionate, and determined educator, with a certification and a master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). She applies traditional and innovative strategies to promote motivation, engagement, and accountability, inclusive of a demonstrated history working in the information technology and service industry. Additionally, Kerrin is an administrative intern, and soon to be graduate, dedicated to uplifting standards and expectations while creating a welcoming, safe, and insightful learning environment for students and adults to promote growth and community. She believes in an interdisciplinary approach, clear communication and setting high, yet achievable standards and expectations. She recognizes that a team is only as good as its leader and is passionate about cultivating a rich, safe, and ethical environment, especially when handled with compassion, strength, and care. She deeply values building positive relationships, collaboration and culture built on diversity and welcomes hallmarks of ambiguity.

Erika Stuff is a passionate educator who joined Webster Thomas High School in 2021 as a member of the English department and has served as a leadership intern for the 2025-2026 school year. Prior to her tenure at Webster Thomas High School, Erika taught at Nardin Academy, Canisius High School, and in the Buffalo Public School District.

Erika has taught all grades 6-12. She has taught Regents and enriched level classes, as well as teaching in co-taught ENL classrooms. Currently her main role is teaching the A.P. Language and Composition classes. Her primary leadership role is around service learning coordination, serving as the advisor of National Honor Society and also helps with the Titan Service Scholars Program. Service Learning is an integral part of her educational leadership pedagogy. Along with coordinating local service projects, she has led service trips to Mississippi, Los Angeles, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. She is excited to use her service experience in her next leadership role.

Kathleen Sullivan joined Fonda-Fultonville Middle School as a School Counselor in August 2021. She is dedicated to supporting students as they navigate challenges, helping them develop the skills, resilience, and confidence needed to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Kathleen holds a Master of Arts in Professional School Counseling from Sage Graduate School in Troy, New York. Prior to joining Fonda-

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