



Summer Principals Academy

Teachers College, Columbia University

April, 2025

Dear SPA Students, Alumni, and Friends,

Welcoming Cohort 2025 to the SPA Community!

Spring marks an exciting time for the Summer Principals Academy as we officially welcome our newly admitted students to Cohort 2025! This summer, they will embark on an intensive journey of leadership development, guided by our dedicated faculty and supported by the rich network of SPA alumni and partners like you.

We have a dynamic orientation planned to introduce them to the program, foster connections, and set the stage for their growth as future school leaders. As always, we are grateful for your continued support in shaping the next generation of leaders, and we look forward to sharing more updates as the summer unfolds!

Best,
The SPA Team

Upcoming SPA Events



IN APRIL



2025

**THUR
10**

MEET AND GREET

Join us for a casual meet and greet to connect with current students and alumni SPA! Enjoy great company, meaningful conversations, and discover what makes SPA such a transformative journey for future school leaders!

⌵ 5:00 PM EST
Mama Sushi | 3478 East Tremont Ave | Bronx, NY, 10465



**MON
14**

SPA VIRTUAL INFORMATION SESSION

Join us for an information session about the Summer Principals Academy at Columbia University! Discover how SPA prepares future school leaders with hands-on learning, mentorship, and a rigorous curriculum.

⌵ 5:00 PM EST | Virtual



**WED
16**

CAMPUS TOUR AND INFO SESSION

Join us for a campus tour and information session about the Summer Principals Academy at TC! Discover how SPA prepares future leaders and experience what life is like at TC!

⌵ 4:30 PM EST
525 West 120th Street | Russel Hall 17 | New York, New York



**THU
24**

PERSONAL STATEMENT WORKSHOP

Come learn more about SPA and finalize your application! Staff will be present to assist with brainstorming, reviewing, and any application questions!

⌵ 5:00 PM EST | Virtual



To request disability-related accommodations, contact OASID at oasid@tc.edu, or 212-678-3689, (646) 755-3144 video phone, as soon as possible.



From Wall Street to the Classroom: A Journey of Purpose

ABOUT

DR. CONNIE SANCHEZ

By: Kiara Haughton

Before entering education, Sanchez spent ten years working on Wall Street for Smith Barney, a Fortune 500 company. Her transition to teaching was driven by a deeply personal experience—adopting two children with special needs. “I wanted to be more involved in their daily lives and education,” she shares. Encouraged by her husband, a former ESL teacher and school counselor, she began her career as a middle school science teacher.

Sanchez started at Elizabeth Public Schools, an urban Title I district and the second-largest school district in New Jersey. Choosing to live in the area, she immersed herself in the lives of her students. “It was a very rewarding experience,” she recalls. “Even my own children attended public school there. I wanted to be fully ingrained in the community.”

A graduate of the Summer Principals Academy (SPA) in 2013, Sanchez continued to advance her expertise, earning a doctorate from Seton Hall University. Her doctoral research explored the intersection of education and artificial intelligence (AI), focusing on how AI can assess higher-order thinking in social studies standards. She noted, “AI is still in its infancy, but what fascinated me was how it could help educators evaluate critical thinking skills. I also found that AI sometimes disagrees with its own assessments, which was an unexpected challenge.”

Beyond research, AI played a surprising role in her own dissertation journey. As a first-generation college student, she navigated the complexities of academia largely on her own. “I ended up using AI as an unofficial committee member, helping me align ideas,

triangulate information, and deepen my understanding of theories.” This experience led her to advocate for AI as a valuable tool for students who may not have strong academic support networks.

Leading with Innovation and Reflection

Sanchez’s time at SPA greatly influenced her leadership philosophy, particularly in her new role. “The classes aren’t much different from when I took them,” she observes, “but they still have the same impact, even though the world of education has changed significantly since I joined.”

Two courses, in particular, had a profound impact. “Course 4001 taught me to approach every problem from the perspective of different stakeholders,” she explains. “Even today, in my leadership team meetings, we ask, ‘What will the parents’ reactions be? How will teachers respond?’ We avoid top-down decisions and prioritize collaboration.” Course 5018 transformed her view of leadership. “Coming from Wall Street, where it’s all about numbers and performance, I had to adjust my mindset. As an educator, you’re more of a coach and a developer, not just managing transactional relationships.” This shift in perspective, which she credits to her educational experiences, has shaped her leadership style and her recent promotion. “Right now, I’m the executive director at Unity Charter School, but I’m about to transition into a new role as the Superintendent of Whartonborough Public Schools,” Sanchez shares. “It’s a huge step. I’m moving from a small, standalone charter school with around 250 students to a much larger public district with two K-8 schools and about 1,000 students.”

The change in scope is significant as she shifts from a suburban environment to a district with a higher population of bilingual and first-generation students, which resonates deeply with her personal background. “It’s an exciting challenge, and I’m thrilled to join a community where I can advocate for the children and the families. I want to be a role model and liaison for the community, especially given my own experience growing up with immigrant parents who didn’t speak the language properly when they first arrived.”

Sanchez’s evolving philosophy of leadership, focused on collaboration and empowerment, will undoubtedly guide her in this new role. It inspired her upcoming book, *Home Girl Leadership*, which emphasizes recognizing and developing strengths within a school community. “Not everyone is distinguished in the classroom, but they might be incredible at fostering school culture, engaging with parents, or building a positive climate. Every role is valuable.”

Preparing Future Leaders

SPA made such a lasting impression on Sanchez that she returned as an Instructional Assistant (IA), coach, and this coming summer will be co-teaching ORLA 5018: School Leadership for Adult Development, helping aspiring school leaders navigate their transition from educators to administrators. “It was eye-opening to see the work that goes into creating these authentic learning experiences,” she shares.

“I worked closely with Dr. White and understood how to shape programs for high-level professionals who already bring so much experience.” As a mentor, she assisted future school leaders in bridging the gap between teaching and administration.



“They’re incredibly intelligent and come in with real-world experiences, but a transformation occurs when you move from teacher to administrator. Your perspective must broaden beyond just your own role. Supporting them in making that transition has been one of the most fulfilling aspects of my journey.”

Moving Forward

Reflecting on her journey, she recognizes the impact of her Columbia degree on her career. “There’s no denying the reputation that the Columbia name holds,” she shares, “but even more importantly, my time at SPA taught me the value of reflection. I apply that lesson in everything I do—whether giving feedback to teachers, leading instructional meetings, or mentoring students. It’s about creating environments where individuals feel empowered to think, discuss, and develop.”

As Sanchez continues to shape the future of education, her passion for mentorship, research, and innovation remains at the forefront. Whether in the classroom or in leadership, she is committed to ensuring that students and educators alike have the tools they need to succeed.



Professional Development

TC Academy

Teachers College, Columbia University

[Learn More >](#)



SCHOOL TURNAROUND PROGRAM

July 28 – August 1, 2025



WHO IS IT FOR?

STP is designed for K-12 state, district, school, and teacher leaders directly responsible for leading ambitious school turnaround initiatives.

WHAT IS THE STP?

The School Turnaround Program (STP)* is an innovative and comprehensive professional development program designed to equip education leaders with the tools, strategies, and insights needed to transform underperforming schools into thriving learning environments.



*This program does not lead to a degree or recommendation for leadership licensure in any state.

JOIN NOW!

+212-678-4142



Email: tcacademy@tc.columbia.edu

TO REQUEST DISABILITY-RELATED ACCOMMODATIONS, CONTACT OASID AT OASID@TC.EDU, OR (212) 678-3689, (646) 755-3144 VIDEO PHONE, AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES



Explore the latest job opportunities in education and leadership roles to advance your career.

East Mountain High School

Middle School Principal and Chief Financial Officer (MS & HS)

Sandia Park, New Mexico

Positions Overview

East Mountain High School is seeking an outstanding Principal with a proven track record of success to lead the new middle school for the 2026 – 2027 school year with a year devoted to planning for the new school during the 2025-2026 school year. East Mountain is also seeking an exceptional Chief Financial Officer (CFO) with a proven track record of success to oversee and manage all financial operations of the organization.

Both job posts are [HERE](#) and can be found on their [website](#).

Please email resume and letter of interest to gbrown@eastmountainhigh.net by March 14, 2025 for best consideration.

Uncommon Schools

Multiple Leadership Opportunities including Dean of Curriculum and

Instruction, Director of Operations, Associate Director of Operations, and Principal Fellow [HERE](#)

Locations: Camden, Newark, New York, and Rochester

The Intrinsic Schools

Principal, Downtown Campus

Chicago, Illinois

Intrinsic Schools is a small charter network in Chicago that is implementing a revolutionary new model for public education that prepares all students for postsecondary success and world-changing endeavors.

Read more about the role and apply [HERE](#)



Fishtank Learning

ELA Curriculum Director, 6-8

- Remote, northeast preferred
- More information about Fishtank Learning [HERE](#)
- More information about the job [HERE](#)

Contact: Christina Howery, SPA | NYC 2012
christina.howery@fishtanklearning.org

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The Summer Principals Academy (SPA) at Teachers College, Columbia University is a transformative graduate program that is committed to promoting equity and excellence in education and overcoming the gap in educational access and achievement between the most and least advantaged groups in this country



tc.edu/SPA