August, 2025

Dear SPA Students, Alumni, and Friends,

As our five-week program comes to a close, we're reflecting on what an incredible experience it has been. In such a short time, we've had the privilege of working alongside students who are growing into thoughtful, strategic, and reflective leaders. Their dedication to learning, collaboration, and personal growth has made this summer truly inspiring.

First-year student Alton shared "The Summer Principals Academy at TC has been more than a program. It has been a mirror, a compass, and a sanctuary. I came in with high expectations, hoping to be challenged and inspired, but what I found went far beyond that. I have been challenged to think more deeply, lead more ethically, and grow more inwardly. For example, in our Social Emotional Learning class, we developed a detailed, clear vision for our life that is meaningful and applicable well beyond the field of education. It's something that empowers me to intentionally align my daily decisions with a larger noble goal in mind. Powerful. What makes this program spiritually enriching is not just the content but the people, the conversations, the questions, the vulnerability. This space does not just teach leadership. It helps you remember why you chose to lead in the first place."

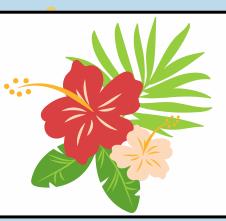
Meanwhile, our second-year cohort has been deeply engaged in preparing for their New School Design presentations. Since the spring, they've been dreaming, designing, and refining bold visions for what schools can be and the systems needed to make those visions real. As second-year student Eleni beautifully put it "New School Design dares us to dream, to envision schools where every child thrives. The true innovation lies in designing the systems that transform this vision into a powerful and sustainable reality."

We're incredibly proud of the thoughtfulness, creativity, and leadership our students have demonstrated. We invite you to explore their work and attend our New School Design Presentation (more details can be found later in this newsletter).

Thank you for being part of this journey. Here's to everything we've accomplished in five short weeks — and all that lies ahead!

Best, The SPA Team

Upcoming SPA Events





IN AUGUST



2025

SAT 09

NEW SCHOOL DESIGN

SPA students will showcase capstone projects featuring innovative school designs promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion



∑ 9:00 AM EST | In Person and Virtual
 525 West 120th Street | Cowin Auditorium | New York, New York

TUES 12

CAMPUS TOUR AND INFO SESSION

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



525 West 120th Street | Russel Hall 17 | New York, New York



MON 18

SPA VIRTUAL INFORMATION SESSION

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



≥ 12:00 PM EST | Virtual

ONGOING

OFFICE HOURS

Talk with Dr. Young to learn more about the SPA program and work on your personal statement and/or application!



∑ Schedule at your convenience!
 http://calendly.com/spa-nyc

To request disability-related accommodations, contact OASID at oasid@tc.edu, or 212-678-3689,

(646) 755-3144 video phone, as soon as possible.



Summer Principals Academy

Teachers College, Columbia University

June in for the 20th annual NEW SCHOOL DESIGN PRESENTATIONS

SPA STUDENTS WILL SHOWCASE CAPSTONE PROJECTS FEATURING INNOVATIVE SCHOOL DESIGNS PROMOTING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

AUGUST 9 9:00AM EST

stream this event live on youtube.com/@summerprincipalsacademytc



New Paths in Leadership

Not all journeys in educational leadership end within the walls of a school.

For some graduates of the Summer Principals Academy, the skills honed in school settings have opened doors to dynamic careers beyond traditional education. These individuals have taken the foundational lessons in leadership from SPA and translated them into new contexts —from legislative advising and policy advocacy to nonprofit innovation and entrepreneurship.

This article highlights the bold transitions and diverse pursuits of SPA students and alumni who ventured into sectors outside education. Their stories reveal how the core principles of educational leadership can thrive and make an impact well beyond school settings.

Lillian Schenck



Lily Schenck is the Senior Director of FutureReadyNYC, a program that serves over 19,000 students across 135 New York City public high schools. Lily draws on a career rooted in classroom teaching, instructional coaching, and systems-level leadership. A former student and instructional assistant at the Summer Principals Academy, Lily credits the program with transforming her understanding of leadership and setting her on a path that extends far beyond the classroom.

Impact in Education

Lily's early work in education laid a strong foundation for her leadership aspirations. She began her career as a teacher before moving into roles as an instructional coach and curriculum specialist in New Orleans, where she led district-wide trainings and authored math curricula adopted across multiple schools.

"Throughout my career—from being a teacher to an instructional coach to an assistant principal and then a systems-wide program director—I've been motivated by building systems where excellent instruction thrives," she reflected. "At every step on my journey so far, I've loved the challenge of figuring out how to expand impact."

Her experiences in these roles also sparked her interest in formal leadership training.

"My early years teaching and coaching showed me how leadership decisions ripple through every aspect of student and teacher success."

She said, "finding a community of other leaders that I could learn from and with was one of the most powerful factors that drew me to apply to SPA."





Learning and Teaching at SPA

Lily chose SPA to build the strategic and organizational skills she knew she needed to lead change on a larger scale. "I was drawn to SPA because I wanted to deepen my impact beyond the classroom and build the skills to lead systems change," she noted. "I realized that to truly scale high-quality learning and equitable outcomes, I needed stronger preparation in organizational leadership, data-driven improvement, and strategic planning."

When reflecting on her experience at SPA, Lily expressed admiration for her former instructors. In particular, she highlighted Dr. Scott Hollinger and Dr. Andra Penny as "legendary educators" and described their classes as "nothing short of transformative."

DREAM DREAM TEAM TEAM TEAM

Their ability to connect research to real school leadership practice, while pushing students to reflect on our purpose and power as leaders, made SPA feel like an incredible place to grow as an educator and leader, as well as an opportunity to think more boldly about where my career might go."



After graduating, Lily returned to SPA as an instructional assistant. She explained her goals in this role: "I wanted to be intentional about creating opportunities for aspiring leaders to wrestle with tough scenarios while also grounding discussions in who they are as people and why they lead." Getting to work alongside the instructors that she had admired as a student allowed Lily to grow as an educator and leader.

"Their example taught me not only how to teach adults but how to design professional learning that is transformational."

Throughout her time learning and working at SPA, Lily broadened her view of educational leadership.

"SPA reframed leadership as building conditions for equity and excellence at scale—through systems, data, and deep engagement with people."

She realized that this work involves systems leaders, community-based organizations, policymakers, employer partners, and so many other individuals beyond the traditional school setting. This prompted her to rethink her own leadership identity and reconsider the direction of her career.



Leading Opportunity

Upon completion of her degree from SPA, Lily served as an assistant principal, instructional coach, and director of school programs across Louisiana and New York. Currently, she is the Senior Director of FutureReadyNYC, a high school pathway initiative preparing students for careers post-graduation.

As the lead for FutureReadyNYC, Lily has helped guide the initiative through a period of rapid growth, thanks to the shared vision and tireless work of the team behind it. "We've doubled the number of school applicants in a year, secured historic funding for pathways work in NYCPS, and next year 1 in every 3 NYC public high schools will be in FRNYC."

SPA's impact on Lily is evident in her leadership at FutureReadyNYC.

"SPA built my capacity to design and lead complex initiatives that drive measurable improvement. I rely daily on what I learned about change management, stakeholder engagement, and equity-centered leadership."

She emphasized the broad applicability of skills like strategic thinking, facilitation, and communication, while also grounding her work in her school-based experience—









a perspective that helps her "build programming that creates real opportunity for students."

Now working outside the school building, Lily defines educational leadership as "doing the work to make it possible, easy, and joyful for leaders in schools to make it easy for educators to educate and learners to learn." Whether in schools, policy offices, or nonprofit boardrooms, she sees leadership as aligning people, data, and resources to create opportunity and drive equity.

Looking Ahead

Lily is working on her dissertation for a Doctorate in Education and is looking forward to the continued growth of FutureReadyNYC across NYC Public Schools.

Her advice to current and future SPA students is rooted in humility, growth, and community:

"Stay relentlessly curious and take full advantage of the chance to interrogate your values and beliefs. Also, cultivate your SPA relationships! Your cohort and professors will become not only lifelong friends and connections, but also thought partners who will support you through the inevitable complexities of leadership."

Above all, she reminds future leaders to be patient and persistent.

"You can't build Rome in a day, but you've got to build Rome every day. Start with small actions to develop your leadership, your team, and your work. If you build that practice daily, you'll be astonished by what you are able to accomplish."



Deidre Alexander



Deidre Alexander serves as the Legislative Director for Congressman Bennie Thompson of Mississippi. Her background in education laid the foundation for a career in public service that would eventually reach all the way to Congress. Now, Deidre brings the values of equity, reflection, and systemic thinking learned at SPA to one of the nation's most influential arenas: federal policymaking.

Exploring Perspectives in Education

Deidre always felt called to teach, believing it was essential to gain an insider perspective within schools to examine the systems that shape them. "I wanted to be in the classroom, to understand the day-to-day experiences of students and educators, and to see how policy decisions actually impact schools," she said. While teaching, she began working on local campaigns and transitioned into education advocacy, where she focused on issues like funding, equity, and teacher pay.

The decision to join SPA stemmed from a desire for growth in leadership, grounded in both history and human connection. The program's legacy of educating Southern Black educators during segregation resonated with Deidre. "I chose Teachers College because of its commitment to equity and leadership development," she reflected. SPA's emphasis on self-reflection and self-awareness also stood out, helping her grow "as both a person and a leader."

SPA proved foundational in expanding Deidre's understanding of what educational leadership can look like. The program introduced models of leadership rooted in systems change, equity, and innovation, strengthening Deidre's desire to influence change on a broader scale.

Leading Policy

Today, Deidre is a Legislative Director in Mississippi, managing Congressman Bennie Thompson's policy portfolio and collaborating with local leaders to bring federal support to underserved communities. "I still get to serve the people of Mississippi, and I carry my time in the classroom with me every day."

In the halls of Congress, the leadership skills honed at SPA remain ever-relevant. Deidre highlights SPA's lessons in coalition-building, conflict resolution, and development of systems that are efficient and equitable. "Whether I am advocating for rural school funding or advancing environmental justice policy, SPA gave me the leadership tools to stay focused and effective while tackling complex problems."

Above all, Deidre appreciates the self-awareness that she developed at SPA. She detailed the challenges of learning her values, recognizing her triggers, and regularly reflecting. "SPA helped me develop the self-awareness and emotional intelligence to lead in high-stakes environments with clarity, integrity, and humility," she shared. That foundation has enabled her to lead policy efforts with the same intentionality she once brought to the classroom.

Redefining Educational Leadership

Deidre exemplifies how educational leadership goes beyond titles like principal or administrator. To her, an educational leader is "anyone who makes decisions that impact students." That includes policymakers, advocates, and community organizers. She explains, "it's not about the title, it's about the responsibility to improve outcomes for students and the systems that serve them."

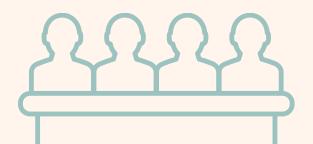
The commonality behind all effective leadership is self-awareness:

"Strong leadership means being able to consider perspectives different from your own. That mindset is what allows leaders to grow and create lasting impact."

Looking Ahead

Deidre plans to continue working in spaces where she can influence policy, direct resources, and push for structural change. She encourages educators to consider how education intersects with broader systems such as policy and government. Reflecting on her formative experience at SPA, she offers the following advice to students:

"Lean in. Lean on your cohort. Don't quit."



Monique Lewis



Dr. Monique Lewis is the founder of Impact Consultants, Inc. where she helps districts, schools, and organizations build cultures of excellence, equity, and measurable impact. But the seeds of that mission were planted long before entrepreneurship came into view. "Early in my career, I saw that challenges weren't about effort—they were about leadership," she said. "I pursued SPA to sharpen my ability to lead with systemsthinking, problem-solving, and purpose." SPA provided Dr. Lewis the foundation she needed to affect school systems and organizations through her executive leadership firm, Impact Consultants, Inc.

Foundations at SPA

When Dr. Monique Lewis applied to the Summer Principals Academy, she wasn't just pursuing a degree, she was seeking transformation. "I was drawn to SPA because I wanted more than credentials," Dr. Lewis reflected. "I wanted to grow, to be changed."

"I wanted to become the kind of leader who drives equity, reimagines systems, and builds capacity at scale."

At SPA, Dr. Lewis developed skills in navigating difficult conversations around equity with emotional intelligence, leading systemic change, and cultivating environments where leaders can thrive. She highlighted the Emotional Intelligence training led by Dr. Marc Brackett of Yale University as a life-altering experience. "It changed how I lead, how I listen, and how I show up at work."

The most profound shift Dr. Lewis experienced was an expanded view of leadership itself. "SPA redefined leadership for me—as strategic, relational, and rooted in values," she explained.

"It's not about position. It's about presence, influence, and the ability to lead systems toward equity and excellence."



Leading Entrepreneurship

Expanding her perspective of leadership gave Dr. Lewis the confidence to explore entrepreneurial and advisory sectors, where equity and systems change serve as the cornerstones of her work, rather than as side initiatives. "SPA showed me that leadership isn't confined to a title," she said. "It's about vision, collaboration, and execution"—skills that apply far beyond traditional roles in education.

As the founder of Impact Consultants Inc., she works alongside educational institutions to activate transformational change through strategy, capacity-building, and executive coaching.

She uses the blueprint learned at SPA to lead with audacity and precision. When faced with challenges, she transforms "complexity into clarity" and turns "obstacles into opportunities."

Dr. Lewis is quick to challenge the notion that educational leadership begins and ends with a position as a principal.

"Educational leadership is the art of moving people and systems toward a more just and effective future—regardless of your role. It's about activating purposedriven influence to build sustainable change across organizations, sectors, and communities."

Looking Ahead

While Dr. Lewis remains committed to her current path of capacity-building and consulting, she sees endless possibilities ahead, whether embedded within institutions or working alongside them.

What matters most is impact.

Dr. Lewis hopes SPA continues to elevate leaders whose paths lie outside traditional school roles. She suggests finding spaces for cross-sector learning and fostering networks beyond the school building. "We need thought partners. We need each other. That's how the legacy of SPA lives on."

To those considering the SPA journey, Dr. Lewis offers this advice:

"Approach SPA as a platform, not a program. Build your vision while you build your capacity. Invest in relationships that stretch you. And stay grounded in your 'why.' The work ahead will demand both courage and clarity."







Anaya Moody



Anaya Moody is a current student at the Summer Principals Academy. She serves as the Curriculum Coordinator for Humanities at Growing Up Green II (GUG II), where she dedicates her work to liberatory education. Her professional trajectory has been rooted in collective transformative pedagogy aimed at fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Beginnings in Education

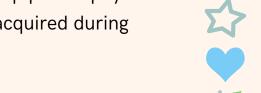
Anaya's journey in leadership began in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn, as a first-year teacher in seventh-grade English Language Arts. "From the beginning, I was deeply invested in how people learn best," she recalled. This curiosity led her to focus on instructional practices and eventually take on roles that allowed her to support other educators in their development. "The more I explored how learning happens—especially for adults—the more I leaned into leadership."

Anaya emphasized the value of working within a supportive school network, which enabled her to develop a skill set that integrated data-driven practices to improve outcomes. She transitioned into roles as an instructional coach and curriculum coordinator, where she was able to both teach and learn beyond the boundaries of a single classroom. "These roles gave me technical expertise," she noted, "but I realized I wanted to build confidence and capacity in leading people."

Leadership at SPA

Reflecting on her motivations to pursue a master's program at SPA, Anaya highlighted SPA's emphasis on reflective leadership and a broader understanding of educational systems. "I had built a strong foundation in data and instruction through my teaching and coaching work," she explained, "but I knew that leading people required a different kind of growth."

At the core of her leadership philosophy is people—a vision she has acquired during her time at SPA.







"It's not just about setting a vision—it is about capacitating others to bring that vision to life. My view of leadership became less about control and more about collaboration and trust." Time management is another great asset that she has developed at SPA. "I now approach decision-making more thoughtfully, taking the time to consider both the intended and unintended consequences, and resisting the urge to rush," she added.

Anaya said that the most valuable skills she has taken from SPA are social-emotional learning and emotional regulation.

"Leading through change, working across different teams, and navigating the corporate education space all require steady emotional presence and the ability to stay grounded while supporting others."

Leading Innovation

As Director of Curriculum and Assessment, Anaya is applying the insights she has learned from SPA to lead beyond traditional educational roles. She is currently engaged in consulting across organizations and contributing to learning and development initiatives in the corporate sector. Reflecting on SPA's role in this transition, she shared, "the tools and mindsets I gained in SPA gave me the confidence to step beyond the traditional school building and apply my leadership in new ways."

When asked about the meaning of educational leadership beyond traditional principalship, Anaya didn't hesitate:

"Educational leadership means leading innovation in how we think about teaching, learning, and development."

For Anaya, being a leader involves being both a systems thinker and a catalyst for learning in any environment—whether within a school, a district, or an entirely different sector.

Looking Ahead

Anaya Moody's professional trajectory illustrates her commitment to dismantling systems that fail to serve all students and her dedication to amplifying the voices of those left unheard. Her impact transcends the school building to reimagine education from the ground up.

As she prepares to finish her degree at SPA, Anaya offers a word of advice to the growing SPA network:

"Soak in all the knowledge available to you. Question everything. Use the program as a space to actively practice leadership—not just in title or task, but in how you make decisions and engage with others. Your growth starts with how you show up now."

Carey Swanson



Carey Swanson is the Chief Program
Officer for Literacy at Student Achievement
Partners. Her journey has been guided by a
curiosity around creating educational
systems where every child has a chance to
thrive. Today, she leads efforts to
reimagine literacy instruction across the
country, bridging research and practice,
and advocating for more equitable, joyful,
and rigorous learning experiences.

A Spark of Passion

Carey began as a classroom teacher, where she quickly realized the importance of collective learning and team collaboration. "I was constantly thinking about how to best work with and learn from the educators in my grade team and school," she reflected. This drive eventually led to her roles as a mentor teacher and coach, where she supported her colleagues in strengthening instruction and building school-wide capacity.

Working in school settings, Carey felt dissatisfied with her curriculum guides and professional learning sessions. She saw a need for evidence-based pedagogy and training to better serve students.

Considering how she could fill this gap, she sought opportunities for leadership development. "I wanted to find a program that was both high quality in terms of leadership development and thoughtful about the schedules and needs of full-time working educators," she recalled. She found that balance in the Summer Principals Academy.

Lessons from SPA

Carey described being inspired by SPA's emphasis on self-awareness and reflection. "My time at SPA was the first time I was part of an education or professional learning experience that was grounded in self-awareness," she said. "This was unique at the time and remains unique to this day."

At SPA, she deepened her understanding of leadership as a people-centered practice.







She learned that true leadership is not about positional authority but about fostering authentic relationships, adult learning, and shared capacity-building. This intrapersonal foundation helped her better navigate difficult conversations, empower others, and remain grounded amidst change.

What resonated most was the idea that leadership must be flexible, responsive, and human.

"The intrapersonal skills of leadership depend on a strong sense of self, including an ability to reflect, make changes as needed, and see other points of view. This grounding can make the difference in relationship quality and authenticity."

Leading Literacy

Carey served as a school leader and instructional coach for several years after graduating from SPA. However, a personal move prompted her to step outside the school setting, bringing the SPA leadership mindset along with her. She transitioned into roles that allowed her to shape literacy work at a systems level, eventually becoming Chief Program Officer for Literacy at Student Achievement Partners (SAP).

At SAP, she now collaborates with schools, districts, and nonprofits to co-design tools and solutions that support research-aligned, joyful, and rigorous literacy instruction.



"The most rewarding part of the work that I do is collaborating with partners in education...to co-design a solution that is going to ultimately support an element of the work of students in their literacy classrooms."

The work is "necessarily nuanced, complex, and best done in partnership, rather than in isolation."

Her recent publication in The Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy exemplifies this approach. Focused on foundational literacy skills for older students, the article advocates for embedding joy and multicultural tools into instruction—especially for adolescents still building core reading proficiency. Carey hopes that educators take away a "conceptual understanding" and "concrete, actionable items" to help leverage students' diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds as assets in their education.

This work reflects a broader shift in the field, one she sees gaining momentum in recent years: "The post-COVID education landscape has laid bare inequities that have been baked into our system for ages, and more teachers, educators, and others in the education community are asking, how can we best support older students?"

Carey has played a key role in spotlighting the unique needs of adolescent learners, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, who are too often overlooked in traditional conversations around foundational education.

Looking Ahead

To Carey Swanson, educational leadership is all about promoting empathy, evidence, and equity in school instruction—no matter the setting. Her career is a testament to what's possible when educators use their skills in self-awareness, collaboration, and relationship-building to build instructional resources for students and teachers outside the school building. Whether in the classroom or national education spaces, her work continues to shape how literacy and leadership intersect to transform students' lives.



SPA Alumni Spotlight

Dr. Chelsea Matthews Franklin



Dr. Chelsea Matthews Franklin's journey into educational leadership is an inspiring story of resilience, transformation, and unwavering commitment to student success. She graciously agreed to sit down with us and recount her experiences as a student, educator, and principal, reflecting on how her time at the Summer Principals Academy (SPA) informs her work today.

Finding Purpose in Education

Dr. Franklin grew up in the public school system of Jacksonville, Florida. She remembers building a classroom in her childhood home, dreaming of becoming a teacher one day. When she entered high school, she learned about teachers' salaries and decided to pursue a more lucrative career as a news anchor. Earning a degree in journalism from Florida A&M University, she thought her career was set. But a chance encounter with Teach for America brought her back to that childhood dream.

In 2010, she began teaching sixth-grade reading at one of Florida's lowest-performing middle schools. The first year was a wake-up call. "I failed miserably at teaching," she admits. "I thought I would be doing myself and our students a disservice if I didn't get this right."

Despite wanting to leave every day, she chose to stay, and in her second year, she improved significantly. When she was shown the statistics of illiteracy, poverty, and educational disparities, she felt her calling. "My heart was stolen...

There was no going back. Once I became an educator, I knew for certain this was what I was supposed to be doing."



That dedication caught the attention of Jacksonville's then-superintendent Nikolai Vitti, who selected her to apply to Teachers College through his partnership with the Summer Principals Academy. After her first application was denied, she refined her leadership experience, became a department head, and worked at an afterschool program. She reapplied, was accepted, and set off for New York in 2014.

The SPA Experience

Reminiscing on her time at SPA, Dr. Franklin highlights the phenomenal people she met, the connections she made, and the opportunities she was given for personal growth. Above all, SPA allowed her to reshape how she saw herself as a leader. "The journey at SPA allowed me to reintroduce myself to me," she explains. From meditations before class to introspective coursework on bias and ethics, she describes the program as "priceless."

One of her most transformative moments came in a course led by Professor Yolanda and Professor Suzanne focused on personal bias and moral leadership. She was forced to ask herself,

"When no one's watching, who's the leader in the room that's going to advocate for kids and make decisions that are going to impact their lives? Who's going to do it morally, soundly, justly?"

Dr. Franklin courageously shared her own growth, acknowledging unconscious biases she uncovered and learned to overcome—something she now uses to ensure fairness and compassion in her decision-making.



Dr. Franklin also reflects on her culminating New School Design project. "It stretched my thinking. It allows you to be innovative. It allows you to think of future solutions to problems we don't even know we have yet." She regards her teammates as "superhumans" with ingenious ideas, and she remembers finishing the project with an exciting sense that "I can go do anything."

Leading with Lessons from SPA

Armed with her SPA degree and internship experience, Dr. Franklin rose quickly in school leadership. She filled multiple assistant principal roles and earned her first principal position at Fletcher Middle School in Duval County, Florida. A subsequent opportunity brought her to Gadsden County High School, where she led the school from a D to a C grade in just one year. "We're bringing Gadsden County back to life," she says, through partnerships, professional development, and her deep belief in what's possible for underserved students.

Currently, Dr. Franklin continues to lead as an education advocate serving in Teach for America's Florida Regions.

At the heart of her leadership style is the innovative thinking and emotional grounding she honed at SPA. She reflects on how the New School Design project equipped her with a blueprint for problem-solving. Having built a network of colleagues, she feels confident that "if I don't know the answer, I promise you, I know somebody who does and we're going to find the answer together."

One of the biggest challenges Dr. Franklin has faced as an educational leader is the multitude of crises that arise on a daily basis. She responds to this challenge with a commitment to mental wellness.

"You have to be very centered in who you are. Your emotions have to be very grounded. You have to have maturity on a supernatural level to be able to balance being pulled in that many directions."



Dr. Franklin is proud of the many roles she plays as teacher, principal, custodian, counselor, and a mother for students, but she underscores the overwhelming nature of a career in education. Pulling from the meditative tools learned at SPA, she states that "knowing who you are and not losing yourself in the process" is one of the most valuable skills she brings to her schools and to her family.



A Final Reflection

Dr. Chelsea Matthews Franklin's journey is one of perseverance, passion, and purpose. From a struggling first-year teacher to a respected education advocate, she embodies the belief that great educators are not born—they are developed through experience, self-reflection, and a dedication to one's community.

"I wouldn't be the educator that I am today if I did not have the experience from SPA," she says. Dr. Franklin extends gratitude to the faculty who shaped her experience at SPA and the alumni who continue to support her throughout her career.





International Educators

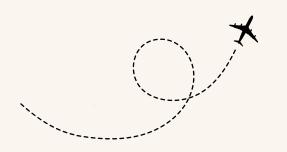
In today's increasingly interconnected world, the classroom knows no borders.

For many educators, teaching abroad is a transformative journey that reshapes their practice, broadens their perspectives, and deepens their commitment to inclusive, culturally responsive education.

At Summer Principals Academy, our students bring with them global experience, working in schools across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and beyond. Whether they built inclusive classrooms in Dubai, formed women's clubs in Guinea-Bissau, or promoted literacy in the UK, these international educators bring invaluable perspectives that enrich the learning community at SPA.

By: Larisa Esposito Xaviera Xu

Diana Pacheco





Diana Pacheco has spent two decades in classrooms around the world, shaping young minds, building programs, and leading with intention. Today, she serves as Assistant Director of Elementary at The Village School in Houston, Texas, one of the most diverse private schools in the country. Her path to school leadership was forged through teaching experiences in the the Middle East, Africa, and Asia and strengthened by her time as a student and instructional assistant at the Summer Principals Academy.

A Global Teaching Journey

Diana's teaching career began in Massachusetts, where she worked in both private and public schools as a special education teacher. While she developed a deep love for the classroom, she also felt a longing for change. Diana was inspired by colleagues who had taught overseas and began exploring international education agencies and attending job fairs. After receiving multiple offers, she debated whether to stay in the US or take the leap abroad—ultimately, a harsh nor'easter storm convinced her that it was time to go.

She landed her first international position at Al-Mizhar American Academy for Girls in the United Arab Emirates. Diana commented that "children with special needs, particularly children on the spectrum, weren't necessarily as developed socially as they were in the United States." In response, she helped launch the school's first inclusion classroom to support students transitioning from home-based services to a formal school setting.

Beginning as an early childhood interventionist and elementary teacher, Diana gradually took on greater leadership responsibilities—first as the math lead, and later as the math department chair.

After five years in the UAE, Diana moved to Egypt to teach kindergarten at the American International School in Cairo. She quickly realized that the school lacked a strong literacy framework and took the initiative to introduce a new writing program and writing committee. While the role allowed her to reconnect with the joy of teaching, Diana felt a growing desire to experience a country that was culturally distinct from those she had previously worked in.

This desire led her to the Kaohsiung American School in Taiwan. She began as a Pre-K teacher and later transitioned to third grade, balancing her love for handson instruction with increasing academic rigor. During her time there, she collaborated closely with the principal and grade-level leaders, an experience that further deepened her interest in school leadership.

Challenges of Moving Abroad

Adjusting to new countries came with a steep learning curve.

"The hardest move was the first one. The idea of packing and selling or throwing away whatever you have...and narrowing down your life...there's a lot of trust you have to have."

Each move brought its own set of challenges. In Egypt, Diana was deeply affected by the visible poverty. "Seeing so many people in the street begging, particularly children," she recalled, was a shock—even for someone who had grown up in the Bronx. The logistical hurdles were also significant; she remembered being one of 40 new hires given just 48 hours to find an apartment. The experience underscored for her the critical importance of clear, proactive communication between schools and incoming staff.

In Taiwan, Diana grappled with the challenges of navigating a country where English was rarely used.

"My brain couldn't make sense of anything. I didn't know if this store was a hardware store or if this store was a supermarket."

Everyday tasks became daunting. She remembered asking cashiers at 7-Eleven for help paying her bills and spending hours in grocery stores trying to locate basic ingredients.

Yet after the first couple months, things began to shift. "I started to get my groove, and I started to make friends," she said. Although she initially wanted to leave at the end of her contract, Diana ultimately stayed for five years, remaining until she was ready to start her next chapter in school leadership.

Joining SPA

Diana first learned about SPA from her colleagues. "I was ready for a shift," she said. The combination of intensive summer courses with year-long internships attracted her to the program. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she attended both summers remotely from Taiwan.

SPA offered a new perspective on how schools operate. "I started to see my school differently," she reflected. "Because of how the first part of the program works, I had tools to be more of a critical reflective thinker." As she was exposed to administrative roles at her school in Taiwan, she learned the importance of mediating conflict and "navigating the political"—balancing the expectations of supervisors, supervisees, and peers.

"All of that just changed how I looked at myself as a teacher leader. I saw myself less as a teacher leader and more as an administrator." After graduating, Diana returned to SPA as an instructional assistant for courses on conflict resolution, law, and decision-making.

"The professors treated me like a thought partner...they saw the value of my experience and they used that."

Diana noted the stark differences between cohorts. "That first cohort, there's just a lot of unpacking of your identity in that first summer, and it's hard." Diana was struck by the cohort's emotional intensity, which was amplified by the return to inperson learning. "But then you have the second cohort, and their issues tend to be more group dynamic issues." Diana learned to balance individual and group support, using skills honed from her own time in the program.

Leading at The Village School

Currently, Diana serves as the Assistant Director of Elementary at The Village School. With students from 94 countries, the school is a living microcosm of global complexity.

"When people say that we are diverse, it's beautiful, but at the same time diversity comes with a lot of different conflict."

Diana shared challenges navigating family dynamics, cultural celebrations, racial language, and gender identity, emphasizing the importance of promoting shared values and courageous conversations. She works with both students and adults to embrace diversity with empathy—promoting curiosity alongside the awareness needed to express difference in a respectful way.

Diversity also deepens selfunderstanding. Diana discussed her identity as a Puerto Rican woman raised in New York, which has equipped her with fluency in both collectivist and individualist cultures. "I'm not conflictaverse. I'm a New Yorker," she said with a laugh. "But I do believe a lot in New York kindness." Differentiating between niceness and kindness, she explained:

"You're only maintaining the status quo when you choose to be nice. Being kind is if you see that there's a problem, especially if it's something that hurts others, you say something. You can't hide, you can't sit on the side of nice."

Looking Ahead

In addition to working at The Village School, Diana is finishing her doctoral degree at Arizona State University. Her research focuses on the effects a consensus-building tool has on disrupting power dynamics in collaborative decision-making. She also became an adjunct professor at Simmons University, her alma mater. In the future, she would consider working in professional development for organizations, teachers, and teams. And she hasn't ruled out going abroad again. "I would like to go back internationally again—this time in an administrative role," she said.

Diana tells future SPA students that "you need to know if education is something you want to stay in in the long run." She urges students to make connections—with your cohort, with your IAs, and with your professors.

"Really lean into getting to know those people because they will be your network beyond your year at SPA."

"And if you want to go overseas, do it."

Diana reflects that the hardest part is saying yes to the first job.

"You have sound decision-making skills. Use them and go. It'll change your life."

Feremias Dremoniz



Jeremias Dremoniz's journey as an educator spans North and South America, Africa, and Asia. He has taught students of all ages, navigated linguistic and cultural barriers, and witnessed how education can be a lifeline and a lever for social change. As an upcoming graduate from the Summer Principals Academy, Jeremias is channeling years of international teaching experience into a mission to transform education in the US—making it more equitable, empathetic, and globally informed.

Teaching and Traveling

Originally from Argentina, Jeremias has always loved to travel.

Reflecting on his early experience moving to the US, he explained, "I really love the challenge of learning a new culture, learning a new language, adapting my stomach to new foods, connecting to people...Once you travel, you just can never stop."

Jeremias first developed an interest in international education while teaching in the Bronx. There, he saw signs of segregation that were deeply entrenched in the education system—under-resourced buildings, food and library deserts, and an inability for underprivileged students to lead healthy lives. Feeling disheartened, he experienced a desire to do more.

"I needed to get out of here just to see if I could help somewhere else because I didn't feel like my work as an ENL teacher was enough."

The English Language Fellowship program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and Georgetown University, offered an opportunity to travel to low-resource countries and support English instruction and teacher training. For Jeremias, it was a perfect way to combine service, cultural immersion, and educational development.

Education across Continents

His first fellowship took him to Guinea-Bissau, a country where more than two-thirds of the population lives in poverty and life expectancy hovers just above age 64. He was assigned to teach English methodology at a local university, but his impact quickly expanded. Noticing a group of widowed agricultural workers behind the campus fields, he began inviting them to informal classes. What started as a small club eventually became a formal organization advocating for women's education and empowerment, with members speaking around West Africa and even in New York.

In addition, Jeremias wrote grants to improve the school's infrastructure, securing computers, Wi-Fi, and air conditioning for a learning center. His work has continued beyond his fellowship, as he currently works to create an Alpowered tool to provide women's health education in local languages.

After Guinea-Bissau, he moved to Senegal, where he was assigned to the region's largest veterinary school. There, he developed English for Specific Purposes curricula to help students access international veterinary and medical literature. His work focused on expanding research competencies and aligning English instruction with the practical needs of future professionals.

In Uzbekistan, Jeremias took on yet another challenge: teaching future educators while navigating a different culture. Reflecting on the birth of his daughter, he remarked how "people didn't smile or laugh as much as we were used to." But over time, he built relationships with locals, and he realized, "people were very happy. It's just expressed differently there." It was a lesson in humility, human connection, and navigating culture shock.

These immersive experiences taught him to value cultural nuances, question his assumptions, and adapt—not just as a teacher, but as a human being.

"If my students invited me to their homes, to meet their families, I needed to go and understand where they were coming from. That makes me a much more empathetic teacher, facilitator, and leader."

A Return with Purpose

Jeremias vowed, "the only way I'd return to the United States was if I found a way that I could really change students and provide learning that is more equal and equitable." Hearing about Teachers College from his colleagues, he first pursued a remote degree in Computing in Education.

Quickly, he learned about SPA and was drawn to its blend of theory and practice, leadership development, and emphasis on equity. He moved his family from Argentina to New York to enroll.

Jeremias is completing his second year at SPA. He serves as an English New Language teacher at Ossining High School, where he brings empathy and insight to his students, many of whom are navigating the same cultural dislocation he has faced. Drawing from lessons learned abroad and at SPA, he incorporates movement, nature-based learning, and socialemotional awareness into his classroom.

Looking Ahead

Reflecting on his time abroad, Jeremias gained new clarity about immigrant-origin students in the U.S.

"They're not just learning a language.
They're coming to school with all this wonderful information, and all of a sudden it's clashing with an entirely new system. It's really difficult because schools have focused so much on developing English, and it's really a full body and mind assimilation of a new place."

His own experiences with culture shock inform his teaching every day, reminding him to see his students not just as language learners, but as whole people navigating complex transitions.

As a soon-to-be graduate from SPA, Jeremias hopes to seek further education in international education policy and management. He dreams of opening schools that "serve as models that include nature and exchange programs for students that don't have access to that," while working on local and international policy to expand those opportunities more broadly.

When asked about his advice to SPA students, Jeremias stated,

"It's okay to want a little more prestige in your life and to want to push for things that are greater."

One lesson stands out: growth begins within.

"The way that we talk to ourselves is the way that we talk to other people. It's impossible to treat others well if we don't treat ourselves well."

Jeremias urges fellow educators to "be a little nicer to yourself," and students will mirror that same kindness in their own lives.

Natalie Robb



Natalie Robb's path to school leadership has been shaped by a deep commitment to justice, equity, and the transformative power of literacy.

Originally from London, she brings an international lens to her work as

English Department Chair at Equality

Charter School in the Bronx. As she prepares to graduate from the Summer Principals Academy, Natalie is working to reimagine what school can look like, one classroom at a time.

Leadership and Literacy in the UK

Natalie did not plan on being an educator. She initially trained to be an actress at the BRIT School, the UK's leading school in performing arts. Alongside acting, she pursued a degree in English Literature, and an experience as a teaching assistant led to a life-changing realization:

"It didn't feel like work. I wasn't watching the clock and waiting for the day to finish. The relationships that you build with all of the people in the community were just so rich and powerful that I was like, right, actually, this is what I could see myself doing."

After traveling and working in the media, Robb returned to education and trained to be a teacher. From the beginning, she took on leadership roles—developing curriculum, training new teachers, and stepping into departmental responsibilities. In 2021, she completed the National Qualification for Senior Leadership in the UK, a pathway to becoming a school leader.

She said, "I think I'm a lifelong learner, and I've also always wanted to be recognized in what I'm capable of doing."

Throughout her training, Natalie focused on improving reading skills and fostering a love of reading.

"Literacy is a tool for bringing about social justice and making change. Not just reading in terms of the technical sense, but actually just opening them up to a wealth of different texts is so important."

She emphasized what she calls a "cultural toolkit," giving students exposure to texts, authors, and real-world experiences that "open their door to different concepts and ideas."

New York City: A System in Contrast

Natalie moved to New York in 2022 and quickly noticed key differences between the education systems in the UK and US. "Within the first year, I was able to see the disparities between what is a given in terms of what students receive as a basic education to what students receive here."

A major difference is space. "Sometimes you might have two or three schools in one building, sharing spaces."

She detailed challenges of holding gym class in a hallway and scheduling use of a single playground. "That doesn't happen in the UK. In the UK, you will have two or three huge playgrounds."

She also remarked on curriculum development: "In the UK, we typically don't buy curriculums. We make our own." In contrast, her current school uses a purchased curriculum, which she estimates can cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Natalie attributes many of these differences to educational policy. In the UK, she explained, there are national mandates around curriculum content and school facilities—including requirements for subjects like geography, history, and modern foreign languages, as well as minimum standards for physical space. "It's just a legal requirement," she said. In the U.S., by contrast, such standards vary widely by state and district, resulting in uneven access to both academic subjects and basic infrastructure.

Adjustment and Empowerment

Natalie currently serves as English Department Chair at Equality Charter School. She is leading a focus on writing development, called the "Writing Revolution." Natalie enjoys seeing her students, particularly English language learners, "assimilate into the community and find themselves."

Reflecting on her professional journey, Natalie spoke candidly about the barriers she has faced as a Black woman in education. "There is a ceiling, especially in the UK," she said, noting that only 4% of school leaders there are Black. "I never had a Black teacher in all of my years going to school." In New York, however, she has witnessed a greater push for diversity. "They understand the importance of having representation of people to represent the kids in the school." As an educator and a leader, Natalie is breaking through limitations and modeling what's possible for the students in her school.

Looking Ahead

Natalie is looking forward to graduating from SPA, where she has developed skills in culturally responsive pedagogy, social emotional development, and data analysis. What she values most about SPA is how it has strengthened her ability to "build the capacity of others."

Her long-term dream is to open a school, one "rooted in culturally responsive practices, activism, and a rich curriculum—with "a building and facilities to match." She is also curious about reviving her creative roots, exploring New York's acting scene after graduation.

Natalie noted that SPA "broke you down as a person and built you back up again." She offered the following advice to future SPA students:

"Be open to feel all the feels... Be open and ready to question your beliefs."

And if you're afraid?

"Work out what you're afraid of—and do it anyway."

Dante Cotton



Dante Cotton's journey in education is a compelling blend of international experience, a deep commitment to equity, and a passion for empowering youth. His path, culminating in the Summer Principals Academy, highlights a desire to impact education from a leadership vantage point, addressing systemic disparities that he has witnessed as both a student and educator.

The Drive for Impactful Leadership

Dante's decision to pursue SPA was fueled by a vision for positive change.
Recognizing "systemic disparities with equity and representation," particularly in

higher education, he sought to transition into a leadership role that could address these issues at their core. SPA has refined this vision, reinforcing his dedication to creating supportive environments where young people can explore their intellectual interests and find their own paths. His motivation is deeply personal:

"I see a lot of myself in the youth I teach."

A World of Experience: Japan, Hong Kong, and Beyond

Dante's early career began with his teaching in Japan after earning his bachelor's degree. This international experience, driven by a desire to understand diverse cultures and educational structures, significantly shaped his perspective. While adapting to a new country presented challenges—from managing finances to mastering the language—he ultimately found a surprising sense of belonging. He noted a fundamental difference in educational philosophies: the US emphasizes early independence, while Japan prioritizes group needs and communal learning.

His international engagement extended beyond teaching to roles as a translator and foreign policy researcher in Hong Kong and a UN DPI Yearbook Editor in NYC. These positions, spurred by an interest in international affairs and a desire for greater autonomy, allowed him to explore how foreign policies, migration, and labor rights intersect and shape societies.

Returning to Roots: Teaching in the Bronx

Returning to the US, Dante now teaches ENL (English as a New Language) in the Bronx. This move was driven by both economic stability and his genuine love for teaching and learning. In his current role, he finds immense reward in witnessing his diverse students' personal growth, recognizing the positive impact he has on their academic careers. His international background has profoundly influenced his teaching, leading him to understand that "policy influences practice" and that a country's history shapes its school climate. He approaches his work by considering his position within this broader societal context.

P.A.I.C.E. International: Cultivating Global Citizens

Dante's commitment to creating opportunities extends to P.A.I.C.E.

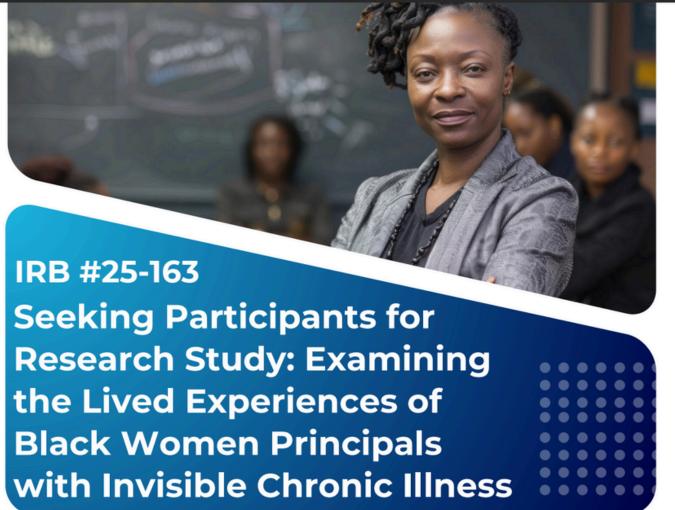
International (Purposeful Access to International Cultural Exchange), a company he co-founded. Inspired by a desire to help others discover their purpose, P.A.I.C.E. aims to provide lacking opportunities by exposing students to diverse cultures, languages, and societies. His vision for P.A.I.C.E. is to build educational partnerships, including dual enrollment programs with higher education institutions like Columbia University, to prepare underserved youth for college and entrepreneurship.

Looking Ahead

Dante aims to continue developing his leadership skills at SPA and plans to launch an overseas branch of P.A.I.C.E. to foster international education and cross-cultural exchange at the grassroots level. His advice to current and future SPA students is simple but powerful:

"Embrace everyone in your cohort-you never know what you might learn!"

Dante Cotton's journey is a testament to the power of global experience, a dedication to equity, and a profound commitment to shaping the next generation of global citizens.







Are you a current or former Black woman principal with an invisible chronic illness? We welcome you to take part in a groundbreaking study that examines the unique challenges and experiences of Black women principals living with invisible chronic illnesses. Your insights will help to shape policies, support initiatives, and educational leadership practices that improve the well-being of principals like yourself.

Participant Criteria

Identify as a Black woman Current or former public school principal

Have an invisible chronic illness



Purpose

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the lived experiences of Black women principals with invisible chronic illness



Time Commitment

- One 60-minute Pre-Interview
- Two 60-minute semi-structured interviews
- Two-week energy journaling (10-15 minutes per day)

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Teachers College, Columbia University, ensuring that all research practices meet ethical standards for participant safety and privacy.

Submit your contact information using the QR Code or Tiny URL



https://tinyurl.com/ m9v3bfe3





JOB OPPORTUNITIES







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

PS 154 District 7 Bronx (Bronx, NY)

Assistant Principal

Seeking inspired, smart, and value-driven Assistant Principal candidates. Candidates can send their resumes to acoviello@schools.nyc.gov

PS 384 Hunters Point Elementary School (Queens, NY)

Assistant Principal

Special Education Teachers: Kindergarten, Grade 3

General Education Teachers: Kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 4, Grade

5, Science Cluster

Dual certification TESOL highly preferred
Send cover letter and resume to Cbritton2@schools.nyc.gov

The Mind Trust (Indianapolis, IN)

Director of Talent

Position Overview HERE

The Mind Trust is dedicated to creating an educational system that ensures every student has access to high quality education – no exceptions. We achieve this by fostering a supportive environment through policy advocacy, community engagement, and empowering talented educators to establish new schools.

East Mountain High School (Sandia Park, NM)

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

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 a 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 <u>HERE</u> and can be found on their <u>website</u>. Email resume and letter of interest to <u>gbrown@eastmountainhigh.net</u>



ABOUT US

The Excellence Community Schools prepare young people in New York City and Stamford to compete for admission to and succeed in top high schools (public, private and parochial) by cultivating their intellectual, artistic, social, emotional, and ethical development. The Excellence Community Schools accomplishes this by offering an award-winning, rigorous academic curriculum with an eye toward college preparation, at the earliest of grades. The Excellence Community Schools achieves this in a supportive and caring environment that maintains high expectations for all students.

OUR CAMPUSES

New York

Bronx Excellence 1 | 1952-1960 Benedict Ave| K-8
Bronx Excellence 2 Elementary | 1804 Holland Ave | K-4
Bronx Excellence 2 Middle | 1744 Williamsbridge Rd | 5-8

Bronx Excellence 3 Elementary | 3956 Carpenter Ave | K-4 Bronx Excellence 3 Middle | 1160 E 213th St | 5-8

Bronx Excellence 4 Elementary | 4300 Murdock Ave | K-4

For Bronx middle school positions, contact: kdickman@bronxexcellence.org and Bronx Excellence 4 Middle | 1160 E 213th St | 5-8 Bronx Excellence 5 | 1946 Bathgate Ave | K-7

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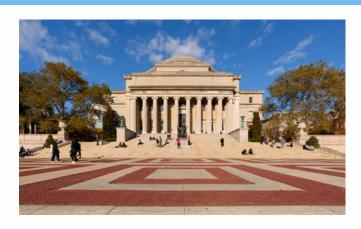




JOB OPPORTUNITIES







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

Maya Angelou Academy (Youth Services Center)

Washington, DC

The Maya Angelou Academy at the DC Department of Corrections is an alternative school serving incarcerated men and women ages 18-22 with individualized education plans.

Dean of Students/Restorative Justice Coordinator (SY 25-26)

Position Overview HERE

The Dean of Students/Restorative Justice Coordinator is a professional educator or counselor who provides direct scholar and teacher support.

Academic Counselor (SY 25-26)

Positions Overview HERE

The Academic Counselor will provide individualized support to help students navigate educational challenges, identify strengths, and overcome barriers. A key focus of the role is designing and leading comprehensive college and career readiness programming that reflects the diverse goals and interests of our students, ensuring a successful transition to life after high school.



