



Summer Principals Academy

Teachers College, Columbia University

May, 2025

Dear SPA Students, Alumni, and Friends,

As we enter this season of celebration, the energy on campus is unmistakable. The flowers are blooming, the sun is shining, and we're filled with excitement as we prepare to watch the extraordinary Class of 2024 walk across the graduation stage. It's a moment we've all been looking forward to—and one our graduates have truly earned.

Convocation this year will take place at the beautiful and historic United Palace Theater, a stunning landmark in Washington Heights that originally opened in 1930 as a movie palace. Known for its breathtaking architecture and rich cultural history, the venue offers a memorable setting to mark this important milestone.

We can't wait to celebrate with you and honor the achievements of our students as they take this meaningful step forward. Here's to the Class of 2024!

Best,
The SPA Team

Upcoming SPA Events



IN MAY



2025

**TUES
13**

SPA VIRTUAL INFORMATION SESSION

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

↘ 5:00 PM EST | Virtual



**THUR
22**

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!

↘ 4:30 PM EST
Pig + Khao | 433 Amsterdam Ave | New York, NY, 10024



**THUR
29**

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



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



NO ONE OWNS A SCHOOL: DR. ELANA NASHELSKY ON COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP, LASTING LEGACY, AND LISTENING FIRST

By: Kiara Haughton

When Dr. Elana Nashelsky stepped into leadership at her dual-language elementary school in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, she wasn't aiming to "fix" anything. She actively resists this philosophy. Instead, she believes in listening, stewarding, and ensuring school leaders remember one powerful truth: no one owns a school.

We sat down with Dr. Nashelsky—an alum of Teachers College's Summer Principals Academy (SPA)—to discuss her leadership journey, her legacy-building work as a principal, and how she's reshaping what it means to lead a school community.

A PATH BACK TO PURPOSE AND SPA

Though she had always loved teaching, Dr. Nashelsky initially resisted a career in education. “I knew I was good at it, but I was afraid,” she shared. “Afraid of what it would mean financially, and afraid of the rigid structure.” But the pull of purpose was strong. She eventually found herself in a school in crisis—seven administrators in eight years—and realized she wanted to be prepared to step in if leadership was ever needed. “I asked my administrator at the time if she would support my candidacy to SPA,” Dr. Nashelsky recalled. “She did—and immediately after graduating, I became the assistant principal.” She is now the principal.

Dr. Nashelsky has been at the same school for nine years and counting, grounded in her desire to invest deeply in her community and offer children consistent, high-quality educational experiences.

When reflecting on her time in SPA, Dr. Nashelsky doesn’t hesitate to name the class with the biggest impact: “Definitely 4001. It forced us to wrestle with real case studies and apply practical strategies as a team. It made me less scared of what I didn’t know.”



SPA, she says, didn’t turn her into an expert overnight—but it gave her the language and structure to confidently meet challenges. “It builds your capacity to not hide from your responsibilities. You might not be great at everything immediately, but you won’t shut down in fear either.”

THE “NO ONE OWNS A SCHOOL” PHILOSOPHY

Inspired by her experience in SPA and the realities of day-to-day school leadership, Dr. Nashelsky developed her own guiding philosophy: “No one owns a school.” This philosophy directly counters the often-glorified image of a principal swooping in to “turn things around.”

“Fix-it thinking is dangerous,” she says. “It assumes the leader has all the answers. But when you step into a school, you’re entering a community with a story. You’re not the author—you’re a steward.”

This belief has fundamentally shaped how Dr. Nashelsky makes decisions. Rather than unilaterally enforcing rules, she builds consensus around the seemingly small but culturally significant norms that shape school life, whether gum-chewing, hoodie-wearing, or water bottles on desks. “These little moments are often racialized, classed, or language-based,” she explains. “If we don’t surface those stories, we can’t make space for everyone.”



FROM QUIET VOICES TO CONFIDENT LEADERSHIP

Perhaps the most touching evidence of her impact is not in spreadsheets or policy drafts but handwritten notes. Dr. Nashelsky shared a story of a shy student council member who quietly passed her a letter about a troubling incident he witnessed. “He trusted me to do something about it. That kind of trust—that’s the legacy I want to leave.”

For Dr. Nashelsky, leadership isn’t about being the loudest or most visible. It’s about helping others—especially students—feel heard, safe, and valued.

LISTENING AS LEADERSHIP

When tensions or confusion arise in her school community, Dr. Nashelsky turns to the researched based model “street data” which are on-the-ground observations and insights gathered from paraprofessionals, students, and families. “We had our Instructional Assistants track what was causing classroom conflict,” she said. The result? A collaboratively developed guidebook of behavioral expectations, written by and for the community, revised annually, and shared with every staff member, substitute, and student.

And it’s not just policy. Through events like Vida Family Coffee and community dinners funded by local partnerships, Dr. Nashelsky fosters a sense of belonging that transcends formal rules. “You see families talking to each other, people crying from meaningful conversations. That’s how we prevent violence—not with metal detectors, but with relationships.”

PRESERVING TRADITIONS AND PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Sustaining a vibrant school culture also means documenting it. Dr. Nashelsky has developed a “legacy planning document”—a month-by-month digital cabinet that stores invitations, flyers, surveys, and reflections for each school tradition.

“These are artifacts of the school’s story,” she said. “And they should outlive me.”

Dr. Nashelsky also emphasizes the importance of policies as part of a leader’s legacy. “Policies are how we legally articulate what we stand for.”

FINAL REFLECTIONS

As we wrapped our interview, Dr. Nashelsky left us with a phrase perfectly encapsulating her approach to education and leadership: “Perspectival humility.” It’s her alternative to the “cultural competence” concept, which she feels implies a final destination. “We’re always learning,” she said. “We never arrive.” And neither does a school. It evolves. It grows. And when its leaders listen deeply and lead collaboratively, it thrives.

For additional insights, see Dr. Nashelsky’s recently published article in Edutopia: [“Why Principals Should Adopt a ‘No One Owns a School’ Approach.”](#)





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SCHOOL TURNAROUND PROGRAM

July 28 – August 1, 2025



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

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JOB OPPORTUNITIES



The Mind Trust

Director of Talent

Indianapolis, Indiana

[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

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.

PS 154 District 7 Bronx

Assistant Principal

Seeking inspired, smart, and value-driven Assistant Principal candidates.

Interested candidates can send their resumes to this email address:

acoviello@schools.nyc.gov

The Intrinsic Schools

Principal, Downtown Campus

Chicago, Illinois

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