

2009-10 Team Members

Kindergarten Team



Margarita Cardona works with the Kindergarten Team as a Teaching Partner with Bette Renoni. Margarita joined The Learning Community in 2006 as a Teaching Partner and is also the proud parent of a student at The Learning Community. Margarita completed college in Colombia and has degrees in modern languages and education. She has always worked with children and loves to work with the local community. She currently teaches English at Channel One. Margarita and her husband have two children and live in Central Falls.



Janelle Conroy has been a Kindergarten Teacher at The Learning Community since 2005. Janelle was previously a preschool teacher in Pawtucket and in Washington, D.C. Janelle holds a Masters of Arts in Teaching from American University and degrees in Sociology and Russian from the College of the Holy Cross. Janelle is certified as a highly qualified teacher and as an English as a Second Language teacher. What Janelle loves about kindergartners is their curiosity about the world, enthusiasm, and love of learning -- things she tries to maintain in her own life, too. She is proud to help children craft their first story and read their first book.



Barbara de Jesus is a Teaching Partner with Mrs. Sena in Kindergarten. Before joining The Learning Community in 2004, Barbara worked at the Hartford Park Community Center assisting families and children for 7 years. She is a certified teacher's assistant and is currently a student at the Community College of RI. Barbara spends her free time with her three children and her husband. Barbara has a wonderful singing voice and participates in local theatrical productions.



Lenny Martinez is a Teaching Partner with Ms. Conroy, and joined the school as a literacy assistant in 2004. Lenny is currently majoring in psychology at the University of Rhode Island. As a male team member, Lenny enjoys being a role model for students. In his free time, Lenny participates in community events, travels and discusses local and national politics. Lenny says, "Growing up in Central Falls gave me a strong sense of diversity. It gave me a good foundation for the love of diverse ethnicities and also a curiosity and drive to learn more about different cultures."



Bette Renoni has been teaching Kindergarten at The Learning Community since 2004. Previously, Bette was a preschool teacher for 16 years, working primarily with 3 and 4 year olds. Bette has a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education from Wheelock College and is certified as a highly qualified teacher. She loves the enthusiasm young children bring to the classroom and wants to instill in each child the feeling that with hard work their future is limitless. Bette enjoys spending time with family, gardening, and walking with her dog, Ellie.



Laurie Sena joined us in 2004 as a Kindergarten Teacher. Laurie is committed to every student. She says, "As an elementary student, some teachers made me feel inferior. I vowed that when I grew up, I would make a difference. I became a teacher so that I could give each student the tools to become a successful adult. All children can learn and succeed. I want to empower each student to dream and to believe in themselves. I want them to shine!" Laurie taught for four years in Providence and Pawtucket. She enjoys kickboxing, skating, reading and spending time with her family. She received a degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Rhode Island and is certified as a highly qualified teacher.

First Grade Team



Jim Chanonhouse has been a First Grade Teacher at The Learning Community since 2007. Jim holds a degree in elementary education from Boston University, and is certified as a highly qualified teacher. Jim previously taught in preschools, children's centers and summer camps in Boston and Rhode Island serving as both a teacher and lead teacher. In addition to teaching academics, Jim has experience teaching music, sports, and science. In his free time you can find Jim playing sports, at the beach or in the garden with his wife. He is a trained singer and amateur guitarist and loves listening to music.



Rebeca Filomeno-Nason is a First Grade Teacher. Rebeca joined our team as a teaching partner in 2006 and then taught second grade. She has worked with children ranging from infancy to age nine, including four years as a preschool teacher. Rebeca graduated from Lesley University with a degree in Human Development and is certified as a highly qualified teacher. Rebeca enjoys her work with children because "while I teach them all that I know, they unknowingly and continually teach me more." She enjoys walking and spending time with her husband and three children at their home in Pawtucket.



Lynn Lotierzo is a First Grade Teacher at The Learning Community. She joined the school in 2006 as a Teaching Partner. Lynn, a highly qualified teacher, holds a masters degree in teaching from Brown University and a degree in Human Development from Cornell University. Before coming to Rhode Island for graduate school, Lynn spent a semester volunteering/working at a charter school in Brooklyn, NY. She has spent considerable time with children in summer camps and schools, which sparked her passion for teaching. In her free time, Lynn loves to travel.

Second Grade Team



Nicole Lucca is a Second Grade Teacher at The Learning Community. Nicole recently graduated from Brown University with a Masters of Arts in Teaching and taught at private and public schools in Rhode Island as part of her studies. Nicole, who lives in Warwick, has worked with young people as a camp counselor, tutor, afterschool program leader, preschool teaching assistant and childcare provider. In her free time she enjoys reading, writing and exercise. Nicole, a highly qualified teacher, has a degree in Psychology from the University of Rhode Island and is interested in history and the environment.



Leslie Richardson is a Second Grade Teacher at The Learning Community who began teaching with us in 2004. She became a teacher after a career as an editor, writer, and bookstore owner. Leslie says "I am drawn to teaching because I love to share the joy that children experience as they learn and discover more about the world." She holds a B.A. in English from Clark University and Teacher Certification from URI and is a highly qualified teacher. In her free time, Leslie enjoys taking hikes, painting, and reading.



Jill Cote is a Second Grade Teacher who previously taught second grade at the Paul Cuffee School in Providence. Jill also currently works as a clinician at The Providence Center and has a Masters in Social Work from Wheelock College. She has worked as a therapist at a bilingual child care center and at a community mental health center. Jill holds a B.A. in Psychology from Wheaton College and is certified as a highly qualified teacher. Jill lives in Pawtucket.

Third Grade Team



Edwin Fladger is a Third Grade Teacher at The Learning Community. Edwin brings experiences as a classroom teacher in public schools in Philadelphia, New York and, most recently, Cumberland, RI. He has also taught swimming and managed recreation programs and summer camps. Edwin graduated from Drexel University where he studied education. Edwin is a highly qualified teacher and lives in North Attleboro, MA.



Karina Flores joins The Learning Community as a classroom teacher in the third grade. Karina is a recent graduate of Brown University's MAT program in elementary education and is a highly qualified teacher. She also has degrees in psychology and Latin American studies from Scripps College in California. Karina has student teaching experiences in two Providence elementary schools and worked as an assistant in a public school in Los Angeles. Fluent in Spanish, Karina studied at the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán in Mexico. Karina lives in Providence.



Kathy Payson is a Third Grade Teacher at The Learning Community. Kathy, who joined the school in 2006, has a Masters of Arts in Teaching from Brown University where she also completed undergraduate degrees in Public Policy and Education Studies. Kathy is certified as a highly qualified teacher. She has had experiences as a mentor, student teacher and volunteer with children and youth in a range of settings. She taught third graders at an English immersion school in Puerto Rico and has extensive knowledge about increasing access to college in the United States. In her free time, she loves to garden and play with her kittens.

Fourth Grade Team



Caroline Cintron is a Teaching Partner in the fourth grade. Caroline, a resident of Central Falls, most recently served as a Program Manager for the Ralph J. Holden Community Center/ Channel One, providing leadership to after school and summer programs for elementary school students. Caroline has also served as a Spanish language interpreter and as a teacher's aide and theater coach in the Central Falls public schools. Caroline has a passion for the performing arts and has performed with Perishable Theater. Caroline lives in Pawtucket with her son.



Kareesh Karlsson joins The Learning Community as a classroom teacher on the fourth grade team. During 2008-09 Kareesh taught Science for part of the year at our school. Before coming to The Learning Community Kareesh was a substitute teacher in the Lincoln Public Schools and was a student teacher in Providence. Kareesh, a highly qualified teacher, received her BA in Elementary Education at Rhode Island College and grew up in Warwick, RI. She has also taught Kenpo Karate to children. Kareesh lives in Providence with her two cats and enjoys reading swimming and travelling.



Kirsten Shroul has been a Teacher in The Learning Community's Fourth Grade Team since 2008. Kirsten most recently taught 1st and 3rd grades in Massachusetts and previously worked as a literacy specialist and classroom teacher at charter schools in New York and Boston. Kirsten has engaged in extensive professional development activities in reading, writing, math and classroom community-building. She has a Masters of Science in Teaching from Pace University and a degree in Business from Boston College. Kirsten is a highly qualified teacher and lives in Woonsocket.



Emily Spikell is a new teacher in The Learning Community's fourth grade team. Emily first came to The Learning Community as a student teacher during her training at Brown's Elementary Education MAT program. Emily also holds a BA in education from the College of William and Mary and is a highly qualified teacher. Emily loves teaching because of the limitless possibilities created by a classroom full of students and their futures. In her free time, Emily likes to cook, draw, and travel. Emily lives in Providence.

Fifth Grade Team



Jane Fontes is a Teaching Partner in our Fifth Grade Team and previously worked with our fourth grade. Jane has years of experience working with people in a range of settings, most recently as a case worker for teenage girls. She has also worked in customer service in a variety of private sector settings. Jane is a graduate of the University of Rhode Island with a degree in Communicative Disorders. Jane is fluent in Portuguese and also speaks Spanish. Jane is a resident of Central Falls and she enjoys music, traveling, and spending time with family and friends.



Maureen Nosal joins The Learning Community as a classroom teacher in the fifth grade. Maureen has over a decade of experience in public schools, most recently as a literacy coach in Pawtucket and a literacy specialist in Providence. Maureen taught second and third grade in Providence's public schools, and is an adjunct faculty member at Brown University's Education Department. She is also an adjunct faculty member at the University of RI and has served as a consultant to numerous education projects. Maureen has a Master's in Reading from the University of Rhode Island and is a highly qualified teacher. She lives in Providence with her husband, Andrew. She enjoys reading, cooking, gardening, and spending time with her two sons when they come home from college to visit.



Graham O'Halloran, or Mr. O, is a Fifth Grade Teacher at The Learning Community and previously taught third grade at our school. Graham received his Master of Arts in Teaching degree from Brown University as well as an undergraduate degree in History. He is certified as a highly qualified teacher. Graham has worked with young people as a teacher, a behavioral therapist and as a mentor and academic tutor. Graham also has years of experience in construction and remodeling.



Leana Shapli is a teacher in the fifth grade at The Learning Community. Leana, a highly qualified teacher, has held a variety of teaching positions including as a fourth grade teacher and special education teacher at a public school in California and at a private school for autistic children. She also worked as a teacher and tutor to child actors on the sets of a television show and a movie. Leana studied psychology and elementary education at San Francisco State University and is currently enrolled in a Master's program in English as a Second Language at RI College. Leana enjoys music, art, dance and gardening.

Sixth Grade Team



Shephali Chokshi-Fox is the new Math and Science Teacher in The Learning Community's Sixth Grade. Shephali brings over a decade of experience teaching in public schools in Massachusetts, including traditional public schools, a charter school, GED program, and independent school. Most recently Shephali was a 7th grade math teacher in Uxbridge, and she has also taught second and third grades. Shephali has a Master's degree in Elementary Education from Wheelock College and a degree in Psychology with a minor in Mathematics from Rutgers University. Shephali lives in Massachusetts with her family and enjoys running, kayaking and gardening.

Claribel Mejia joins The Learning Community's new Sixth Grade Team as a Teaching Partner. Claribel has extensive experience working with children through the Providence YMCA afterschool and pre-school programs and as a Pre-K teacher in a private preschool. She is currently completing a degree in Early Childhood Education at the University of Rhode Island and has taken courses at RI College, CCRI and numerous professional development programs. Claribel lives in Providence, where she grew up. Claribel is also a big baseball and basketball fan.



Julia Van Dyke joins The Learning Community's new Sixth Grade Team as an English and Social Studies Teacher. Julia has recently been a substitute teacher at Times² Academy and other Providence public schools. She has also taught adult education courses in Providence and Boulder, CO. Julia has an MAT in secondary English/ Language Arts from Brown University and a degree in literature from Hampshire College. In her spare time, Julia likes running, swing dancing, and riding her bike. She lives in Providence.



Jennifer Wyron is a new Teaching Partner in the The Learning Community's Sixth Grade. Jennifer is a recent graduate of Brown University, where she studied Comparative Literature. She has worked with youth as a health educator at the MET School, as a public health volunteer in Mexico, and at a domestic violence shelter in Providence. Jennifer has strong interests in women's issues and community health, and she is fluent in Spanish. She enjoys dance and theater, exploring the outdoors, and practicing yoga.

Academic Specialists & Support Team



Liz Andersen is the school nurse at The Learning Community and was part of the school's founding team. The Learning Community's Nurse Teacher. Liz has varied clinical experience from working at Family Service of Rhode Island, VNA of Care New England, Hasbro Children's Hospital and other settings. In her spare time, Liz enjoys swimming at the beach, reading good books and spending time with friends and family.



Ben Chokshi-Fox joined The Learning Community in 2005 as our school Social Worker. Previously Ben worked in a variety of settings with youth including schools, foster care programs, clinical research projects, shelters and mobile treatment teams. Ben has a Masters in Social Work from Salem State College and degrees in English and Africana Studies from Rutgers University. Ben is fluent in Spanish and Swahili and is very handy with a hammer and saw. He lives and kayaks in Massachusetts with his wife and two children.



Lindsay Correia is our Speech-Language Therapist. She was born in Guatemala and came to the United States at the age of three. She speaks Spanish fluently and is one of the few bilingual speech-language therapists in the state. As a consultant, Lindsay also works at Rhode Island Hospital and the Autism Project. She has also worked with Family Service Early Intervention, the Wolf School, and public schools in the metropolitan Washington DC area. Lindsay has a Masters degree in Speech-Language Pathology from the University of RI. In her spare time she enjoys traveling and spending time with family and friends. Lindsay currently serves on the school's board of directors.



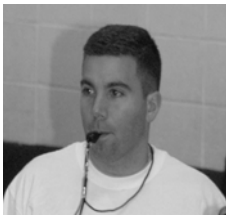
Cathy Derouin is The Learning Community's Special Education Director. Cathy, who has been a special education teacher since 2001, says, "I want to see all children learn. I want to make a difference in the lives of children who find school more of a challenge." Before coming to The Learning Community in 2004 she taught at schools in Warwick and Providence. Cathy has a bachelor's degree in Special Education/Elementary Education, a Masters in Counseling and Educational Psychology and is certified as a special education administrator. In her free time Cathy enjoys spending time with her husband and son traveling in New England, especially to the White Mountains in New Hampshire. Cathy is certified as a highly qualified teacher.



Maria Eguia-Brusco works part-time as our School Psychologist supporting the mental health needs of children and families. Maria also has a part-time private practice in Warwick, RI where she works with children, adolescents, and families. In her free time, Maria enjoys traveling and spending time with family and friends.



Joanne Fulton is a Floating Teaching Partner working with multiple classrooms. Joanne holds a Masters of Arts in Teaching from Roger Williams University, a bachelor's degree in social work and is certified as a highly qualified teacher. She has worked as a long-term substitute at local independent and public schools, and as a therapist with pre-school and kindergarten students. Joanne also has a Masters degree in Business Administration and has worked in the private sector in operations, training, staff development and curriculum design. Joanne lives in Barrington with her husband, two children, two dogs and a cat.



Brent Fusaro joined The Learning Community in 2009 as a Physical Education Teacher. Brent brings six years of experience teaching Physical Education in Providence to his work with our team. He has also have coached Middle and High School level basketball as well as baseball and softball. Brent, a graduate of Rhode Island College, lives in Westerly with his wife and two children.



Lauren Gray Balbuena is a Teaching Partner at The Learning Community. Most recently Lauren worked at Trudeau Center for adults with disabilities. Lauren holds degrees in Elementary and Special Education from Keene State College. She spent a semester abroad in Spain and also earned a degree in Spanish. After graduating, Lauren spent two years teaching in the Dominican Republic where she became fluent in Spanish and also where she met her husband. Lauren works with children because "I know they all have the ability to learn and achieve as long as someone believes in them. I love being the one to believe in all of my students and watch them as they learn and grow."



Amy Keefe joins The Learning Community as our new Science Teacher. Amy has taught in the Seattle, New York City and Oakland, CA public school systems serving as a third grade teacher and a bilingual instructional assistant. Amy recently returned from a year in Peru working on environmental management as a Peace Corps volunteer. Amy has a Masters in Education from Antioch University and a degree in International Relations from American University. Amy is fluent in Spanish and is passionate about gardening and soccer.



Cheryl Luciano, who joined the school in 2004 as a Kindergarten Teaching Partner, is the school's Literacy Assistant. Cheryl "enjoys the challenges and opportunity that comes with growth." Cheryl is from one of three Hispanic families that lived in South Providence in the early sixties. When not at school, Cheryl enjoys dancing, music, cooking, singing and laughing. Before coming to the school Cheryl worked at Family Service of RI as a case manager and interpreter in both their Early Intervention and Wellness programs. Cheryl is continuing her own education at the Community College of RI.



Caroline Marandino is the Reading Specialist at The Learning Community. Caroline was previously a First Grade Teacher and a literacy assistant at our school. Caroline has a master's in reading from Wheelock College, a master's in teaching from Brown University and a degree in Psychology from the University of California at Davis. Caroline taught in the New York City public schools before coming to The Learning Community, and she is certified as a highly qualified teacher. Caroline likes to run and has run in several marathons. Caroline has a young daughter, Annabella.



Meghan Recupero is a new Floating Teaching Partner at The Learning Community. Meghan has worked for six years as an afterschool advisor and teacher's assistant at the Paul Cuffee School in Providence. She recently received her MAT in elementary education from RI College and has a degree in English from the University of Rhode Island. Meghan, a highly qualified teacher, has had student teaching experiences at public schools in West Warwick, Providence, Coventry and North Providence. Meghan lives in Jamestown with her husband and her son.



Ella Bodnar-Rodriguez is the Physical Education Teacher at The Learning Community. Ella has engaged young people in exercise and sports as a coach, camp leader, Girl Scout leader and as a track and field official. Ella also worked as a mentor and after-school leader for elementary students in Providence through the Children's Crusade. Ella was a national champion track athlete in her home country of Romania and a Rhode Island State Champion. Ella lives in Providence with her husband.



Abi Wilson is an Instructional Coach at The Learning Community and previously was our Reading Specialist. Abi has a Master's in the Teaching of Reading from Wheelock College and degrees in elementary Education and theater from Roger Williams University. Abi taught first and second grades at a charter school in Providence where she also served as a mentor teacher for teachers in training. Abi is certified as a highly qualified teacher. Abi has a young daughter, Emmie. When she is not at school, Abi enjoys gardening, cooking and reading!



Christine Wiltshire is an Instructional Coach and a former first grade teacher at The Learning Community. Christine joined our team after several years at a charter school in Providence. Christine has served as a mentor teacher at Brown University's Education Department where she received her Masters of Arts in Teaching degree as well as an undergraduate degree in Biology. Christine is certified as a highly qualified teacher. Her parents migrated to America from Trinidad before she was born. She grew up in Queens, New York and loves to dance and sing.



Casey Woodard joined The Learning Community team in 2008 as a Floating Teaching Partner. Casey previously served as a substitute teacher in Johnston and Pawtucket public schools. She also taught at a private tutoring center supporting individual students in math and reading. Casey received a BA in Elementary Education from RI College and is a highly qualified teacher. She lives in Providence with her family.

Administrative Team



Kathy Army joined The Learning Community in 2008 as a part-time Business Assistant supporting the school's operations. Kathy has worked in a variety of education and community settings including at a college, a day care center, and at her church. Kathy is the mother of three children. She enjoys gardening, reading, taking walks with her dogs and going on long motorcycle rides with her husband.



Sarah Bernstein manages non-academic time at The Learning Community. Before coming to the school in 2006, Sarah worked with the Providence After School Alliance (PASA), a citywide initiative to increase the quality of afterschool programs for youth. She has also served as a 7th grade teacher at a Providence charter school. Sarah is a graduate of Brown University with a degree in Ethnic Studies and a teaching certificate in Secondary Social Studies. Sarah loves to cook, especially with food grown in her garden. Sarah lives in Providence, and often gets to school on her bicycle.



Kath Connolly joined the school in 2006 as the Director of Partnerships, working to link the school to community resources. Kath has held jobs in education, policy and community development including work at Brown University, the Providence Children's Museum and private consulting. Kath spends her free time in her studio making things, in her garden growing things and working on local community development projects. She lives in Providence and has a degree in English literature from Brown University.



Maria Duque, a native of Colombia, is The Learning Community's Administrative Manager. Maria recently served as the Executive Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent of the Central Falls Public Schools. She also spent over six years as the assistant to the Executive Director of Progreso Latino in Central Falls. Maria is the proud mother of Jorge Londoño.



Sarah Friedman is a Co-Director of The Learning Community. Sarah was the director of the Mental Health and Wellness Initiative at Hope and Feinstein High Schools in Providence, systematizing a model of student support with Family Service of RI. As the Associate Director of Teaching for Tomorrow, Sarah began a successful model of family engagement in six Providence elementary schools. She holds a degree in American Civilization from Brown University. In her free time, Sarah enjoys painting, running and reading. She also traveled through Central America on her bicycle! Sarah believes that all parents care about their child's education and that all parents have the right to be a part of their child's education.



Manny Frietas joined our team in 2006 as our Maintenance Coordinator. Manny was previously the Production/ IT Manager for WaterFire Providence for fifteen years. Manny's wide range of talents include computer, audio and other technical skills. Manny has an interest in music and design and is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Computer Science.



Jeremy Giller joined the Learning Community in 2008 as our Director of Development. Jeremy previously worked at a communications and strategy consulting firm in Providence that served clients in education, healthcare and public policy. Jeremy has also been the Director of the Providence HELP Lead Safe Center, a policy analyst for The Providence Plan and a freelance writer and editor. He graduated from Brown University with a bachelor's degree in public policy. Jeremy enjoys cooking, bicycling and obsessing about the Red Sox. He and his wife Julie are the proud parents of twins.



Andrena Mason joined The Learning Community in 2009 as the Administrative Coordinator of our emerging professional development lab. Andrena has taught at elementary and middle schools in NY and Washington, DC and has also worked with youth in community-based settings. She also brings experience in program design, research writing and administration. Andrena graduated from Syracuse University with a degree in journalism, and she lives in Cranston.



Meg O'Leary is a Co-Director of The Learning Community. Meg was the director of the Olneyville Community-Schools Initiative in Providence and has extensive experience working with schools, community-based organizations and citizens. Meg previously directed Teaching for Tomorrow, an innovative professional development program for elementary school teachers in Providence's public schools. Meg was also the director of the SCOPE initiative in Central Falls. Meg believes that children from every economic and cultural background deserve an excellent education and that professional development schools are one way to achieve high quality. Meg holds a degree in Elementary Education from the University of Rhode Island.



Ed Reis is the Maintenance Assistant at The Learning Community. Ed joined our team with over 35 years of experience in various departments at a manufacturer of furniture upholstery. Ed was born in the Azores and came to Rhode Island when he was 12. He likes to read, fish, play tennis and visit historical sites. Ed lives in Cumberland.



Tag Tanalski is an Administrative Coordinator at The Learning Community, supporting the many systems that help our school function effectively. Tag brings an interest in education from experiences as a teacher and teaching assistant in schools and community settings to his work. He has also worked in a range of other professional settings from home remodeling to financial services to higher education. Tag has an MFA in Theater Arts from Brandeis University and holds a secondary teaching certificate. When not at work Tag enjoys sailing, biking, hiking, reading and performing.



Jackie Torres is an Administrative Assistant at The Learning Community, and she's the first face you see when you walk in our door. Jackie has a winning smile. She earned an Administrative Associates degree from the Community College of Rhode Island and holds certificates as a pharmacy technician and medical secretary. She has worked in a variety of settings as a bank teller, medical secretary, tobacco counselor, and office assistant.



Nick Vockerodt joins The Learning Community's team in 2009 to lead new afterschool programming. Nick brings experience working with children as a teacher's assistant and after school leader at a charter school and work as a mentor in Washington, DC. He also has worked as a research assistant for a school partner project in New York City and a commission exploring urban education in Rhode Island. Nick recently graduated from Brown University with a Master's degree in urban education policy and also holds a degree in history from Occidental College. Nick enjoys bicycling and lives in Providence.



Marie Whitten is our Business Manager. Marie has lent her "can do" financial spirit to numerous local non-profits including WaterFire, the Providence Preservation Society, and Rhode Islanders Sponsoring Education. Marie holds a degree in Education from Salem State College and lives in Barrington, RI with her husband, Steve and her daughters, Kate and Sarah. Marie enjoys rollerblading, biking and gardening.