



Who's Who: Teachers at PS 261

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PS 261 Magnet School for Integrating the Arts
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Administration



Zipporah Mills
Principal

Ms. Mills returned to PS 261 in 2005 after serving as assistant principal at PS 59 in Bedford Stuyvesant for two years. Ms. Mills was born and raised in East New York. She decided to become a teacher when she attended Thomas Jefferson High School and

student-taught at a daycare facility. She taught for 16 years at PS 273 before first coming to our school in 2000 as an invention teacher. Ms. Mills has a Bachelor's with a double major in Education and Black and Puerto Rican Studies from Hunter College. She also has a Master's in Reading from Mercy College and an advanced certificate in Administration from Adelphi University. She lives in Queens Village and has three children, all in college. In addition to spending time with family, Ms. Mills enjoys reading and gardening.

Lena Barbera
Assistant Principal

Ms. Barbera came to PS 261 in 1996 as a teacher in the upper grades, and then, as math coach, was responsible for implementing a new curriculum and modeling instructional practices for new teachers. This is her third year as assistant principal in a school community that she knows so well—she is a former PS 261 parent. She was born and raised in Carroll Gardens and still lives there with her husband and two sons, who attend high school. Lena has a Bachelor's in Geology and a Master's in Elementary Education, both from Hunter College. She also has a Master's in School Administration and Supervision from Brooklyn College.



Pre-Kindergarten



Lorna Justice
Pre-K
Portable B

Miss Justice has been teaching for two decades, most of them at PS 261 and mostly in kindergarten. She has been very happy teaching pre-K since 2002. "I love seeing children develop as learners," she says. She received her Bachelor's in Spanish and her Master's in Early Childhood Education from Brooklyn College. At home, she's busy with two dogs,

two cats and two sons, one grown and one a teenager. She also loves gardening, dance and music.

Vivian Lipman
Pre-K
Portable A

Miss Vivian, a veteran teacher of nearly two decades, earned a Bachelor's in Developmental Drama and Early Childhood Education from Hunter College. She has a Master's in Elementary Education with a specialty in English as a Second Language from Adelphi University. Miss Vivian has taught pre-K since 2004, but she has spent most of her career teaching kindergarten, as well as first and second grades, and much it at PS 261. At home she keeps busy surfing the Internet, swimming, biking, doing arts and crafts and working on home projects.





Jocelyn Benford
K-113

Jocelyn joined PS 261 in 2004. Previously she taught a combined second/third grade class near Seattle for three years. Formerly an actress, Jocelyn has a Bachelor's in Drama and a Master's in Educational Theatre, both from New York University. She also has a Certificate in Teaching and Human

Development from Pacific Oaks College Northwest in Seattle. Jocelyn and her husband live in Clinton Hill with their daughter, who is a student at PS 261.



Jamie Rose
K-117

Jamie began teaching at our school in 2002. With a Bachelor's in English from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and a dual Master's in Early Childhood and Elementary Education from New York University, Jamie is happy to be at PS 261. "I love

the school. The kids are wonderful and the faculty is great." At home, this Westchester County native loves to cook and explore Brooklyn. Jamie is getting married in August.



Allison Harman
K-124

Alli grew up in Fairfield, Connecticut. She is working on her Master's in Literacy at New York University, where she received a

Bachelor's in Elementary Education. She joined PS 261 in 2003. Before that, Alli taught first grade at PS 110 on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. She now lives in Prospect Heights and enjoys running, traveling, and relaxing with friends and family.

Kindergarten

Christine Chiappinelli
K-119

Christine came to PS 261 in 2003 after teaching first grade in Lower Manhattan. She received her Bachelor's in Special Education and Elementary Education, with a concentration in Psychology, from New York University. Christine, who is skilled in American Sign Language, also enjoys reading and singing. She began college as a musical theater major and enjoys incorporating drama and music (especially singing!) into her classroom. Christine lives in Boerum Hill with her new husband and their kitten, Danni.



Teachers are referred to in these pages as they prefer to be called by the children.

Danielle Taylor Brocco
K-115

Miss Danielle, who came to PS 261 in 2002, has taught 4th grade-CTT and served as the librarian and enrichment coordinator here. She grew up in Long Island, where she was inspired to teach by watching her older sister grade papers. Miss Danielle has a Bachelor's in Dietetics from the University of Delaware and a Master's in Elementary Education from C.W. Post on Long Island. She lives in Carroll Gardens with her husband and their cat, Hunter. She enjoys snowboarding and reading a good book.



Lucy Lopez
K/1/2-109A

Mrs. Lopez teaches the MIS IV Spanish readiness program and has taught at PS 261 for 20+ years, always in Special Ed. This native New Yorker graduated from Brooklyn College with a Bachelor's in Physical Education and from Hunter College with a Master's in Education with a specialty in Learning Disabilities. It gives Mrs. Lopez great pleasure to see her students grow and become independent learners. Away from school, she enjoys spending time with her family and traveling.

First Grade



Alexandra Catanzaro
K/1/2-215

Alexandra has been at PS 261 since 1998. She received her Bachelor's in Psychology from St. Frances College. Alexandra enjoys travel, biking, reading, and spending time with friends and family. She appreciates parents and welcomes them in the

classroom to share their talents. Alexandra values the small size of her class and encourages her kids to, "tell me all the things that you like to do and learn about!"

Aryn Longarino
1-221

Aryn began teaching at PS 261 in 2003. She has her Bachelor's in Elementary Education and Art History from New York University and she recently completed her Master's in Literacy, also from NYU. Aryn lives in the Bronx but has fallen in love with Brooklyn, especially its restaurants. She is fluent in Italian, is a certified make-up artist, and she *loves* the beach.



Jennifer Costanzo
1-212

Jenn has been at PS 261 since 2002. She originally taught kindergarten and she moved to first grade this year. She has her Bachelor's in Elementary Education from New York University, where she's currently working on a Master's in Elementary Mathematics; she will graduate in May. One of her favorite things about PS 261, Jenn says, is the collegial atmosphere among all the teachers.



Millie DeStefano
1-209

Millie, who is originally from Cobble Hill and is bilingual in Spanish and English, has been teaching at PS 261 since 1990. She received her Bachelor's in Early Childhood Education and her Master's in Early Childhood Education from Brooklyn College. Millie brings her love of art to the classroom; in fact, she studied at the School of Visual Arts. She also loves cooking, reading, crochet, needlepoint, walking, dance, figuring out her computer, and spending time with her grown son.



Yvonne Edwards
1-208

Yvonne has been at our school since 1996. Before this she worked on Wall Street for 10 years. She received her Bachelor's in Early Childhood Education and a Master's in Elementary Mathematics from Brooklyn College. Yvonne, who is from Panama, speaks Spanish fluently. She enjoys singing and attending performing arts events. Yvonne likes being with children, she says, "because I can be myself."



Marisa DeChiara
1-210

Marisa has taught in the early grades for 15+ years, half of them at our school. She received her Bachelor's in Special Education from SUNY-Geneseo and her Master's in Early Childhood Education from Bank Street College. She brings her love of music to her classroom. She says the children are the best thing about her job, and she encourages them "just to be themselves."



Jamie Fidler
1-211

Jamie joined PS 261 in 2004. Previously, she taught second grade and pre-school. Jamie has a Bachelor's in Children's Literature and a Master's in Early Childhood Education, both from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Her favorite children's book authors are Maurice Sendak and Doris Burn. Jamie's favorite pastimes are bicycling, bicycling, bicycling—and bicycling! She also enjoys yoga, Pilates, and cooking, and lives in Park Slope.





Nan O'Shea
2-324

Nan has been at our school for a decade as both a teacher and a parent (her daughter is a PS 261 graduate). Her previous experience includes staff development, teaching music, and working on stage as an actress. Nan received her Bachelor's in Theater Arts and English at San Francisco State University and her Master's in Elementary Education from Hunter College. Nan likes to create a lively, hands-on learning environment and considers the classroom a society and community.

Second Grade

Jennifer Klein
2-317

Jennifer joined PS 261 in 2003. She was drawn to our school by its philosophy of integrating arts into the curriculum and finds PS 261 to be a "a positive place with really wonderful parents." Jennifer, who in her spare time plays bass guitar, lives in Maplewood, N.J., with her husband and a dog named Max. She has a Bachelor's in Literature and Writing from the New School for Social Research and a Master's in Literacy from Teachers College, Columbia University.



Annette Bellacosa
2-319 CTT

Ms. Annette taught at PS 261 for more than 25 years, from pre-K through second grade, and then she left in for three years to run a special reading program at a school in Queens. She returned last year and she's thrilled to be back. "I have such motivated, delightful students and the curriculum is so much fun," she says. At home Ms. Annette enjoys playing the piano, taking care of her three cats ("my boys!"), playing Sudoku with her daughter, Megan—who is one of the art teachers at PS 261—and walking along the water in Bay Ridge, where she lives.



Katy Wells
2-224

Katy has been teaching for more almost a decade, mostly at PS 261. She loves watching the children's many changes. She especially enjoys working with other teachers and praises her colleagues' cohesiveness. On her own time she likes to travel, go to the beach, and spend time with friends and family. Katy, a native Californian, received her Bachelor's in Religion from Bard College and her Master's in Elementary Education from Smith College.



Diana Holliday
2-213

Ms. Diana has been teaching since 1999. She received her Bachelor's in Theater from Fordham University and her Master's in Elementary Education from Dowling College. Ms. Diana lives in Park Slope and enjoys traveling, cooking, glitzy jewelry, spending time with good friends and her husband, Andrew, and her dog, Zelda.



Marcy Mattera
2-313

At home, Marcy finds time to camp, bike, and read. "Every summer I read a huge stack of fiction!" she says. In fact, nurturing literacy is one thing Marcy loves about teaching, which she has been doing since 1996. She received her Bachelor's in Elementary Education from New



York University and a Master's in Reading from Brooklyn College. Marcy lives in Dyker Heights with her husband and their cranky cat, Cally, and new puppy, Lucy.

Robyn Taragan
2-319 CTT

Ms. Robyn started at PS 261 in 2005. She received her Bachelor's in Child and Family Studies from Syracuse University and her Master's in Childhood and Special Education from New York University. Originally from Long Island, Ms. Robyn now lives in Manhattan. She loves to play tennis and travel and has spent the last nine summers working at a day camp on Long Island. Second grade has always been her "dream grade" to teach.



Third Grade

Melissa Farran 3-309

This is Melissa's first year at our school. A child of Brooklyn teachers, she taught first grade in Philadelphia for three years and then spent two years subbing in New York City while looking for the perfect school, "which I have definitely found in PS 261," she says. Melissa has a B.A. in Women's Studies from SUNY-New Paltz and two Master's degrees, one in Elementary Education from Temple and one in Museum Education from University of the Arts, both in Philadelphia. She likes teaching, Melissa says, because, "I like helping students realize just how brilliant they are." She loves going to museums and seeing theater.



Mandy Beckerman 3-314 CTT

Mandy came to PS 261 from the Churchill School in Manhattan, a special education school, in 2005. Before teaching, she was a website producer for seven years. A Manhattan native, she received her Bachelor's in Political Science from the University of Wisconsin and her Master's in Special and General Education from Bank Street College. Mandy now lives in Brooklyn with her new husband and their dog, Harry. She loves travel, reading, movies, music and friends. In the classroom, she likes to "keep open communication with the kids."



Mary Showers 3-312

Mary began at PS 261 in 2005 as the librarian and enrichment coordinator. She is thrilled to be have her own class this year. Before becoming a teacher, Mary worked in museums as well as the Old Executive Office Building in Washington, D.C. She received her Bachelor's in Political Science from the University of Wisconsin and her Master's in Elementary Education from New York University.



Jennifer Lindauer-Thompson 3-314 CTT

Jennifer received her Bachelor's in Psychology and Italian from SUNY Albany and a Master's in Childhood Education and Special Education from New York University. She also spent a year studying art and language in Italy. She joined PS 261 in 2004 after student-teaching here in the third grade. Jennifer enjoys traveling, camping, hiking, reading, and dance classes. A native of Rochester, she has come to love Brooklyn, where she lives.



Waita Moore 3-310

Ms. Waita came to PS 261 in 2005 after five years at PS 8 and PS 67. This native New Yorker has a Bachelor's in Political Science from City College University of New York. She is working on a dual Master's in Elementary and Special Education. Before teaching, she clerked at law firms and worked for the American Red Cross. She enjoys running, drawing, and music. Ms. Waita, who lives in Brooklyn Heights, believes that teaching is "helping to shape the community's future."



Jamie Matus 3-315

"I value our school's community—the faculty, the parents, and the students. The environment is enriching and supportive and has helped me grow as a teacher," says Jamie, who has been teaching for more than five years, most of them at PS 261. Jamie has a Bachelor's in Psychology and Early Childhood Development from the University of South Carolina and a Master's in Education from Fordham. She's also active in leadership groups at Teacher's College. Jamie loves: living in New York City, her cat, and reading, writing, and swimming.



Theresa Foley 3-308

Theresa began teaching at PS 261 in 2002. She enjoys the team of teachers she works with and the exciting things her students are doing in literacy. She has a Bachelor's in Elementary Education from New York University and is working on her Master's in Mathematics Education at Brooklyn College. Theresa grew up on Long Island and now lives in Park Slope with her brand-new husband. She has two cats and loves to knit and read.



Maureen Reilly
4-408

Maureen came to PS 261 in 2004, when she student-taught for a year. This is her second year in her own class. Maureen has a dual Master's in Elementary Education and Literacy from Bank Street College. Her Bachelor's in Drama and English is from SUNY Albany. Maureen previously wrote and produced commercials, promotions and websites, her last position being with The LEGO Company. Maureen founded and co-runs the very popular LEGO Robotics team at PS 261. She lives in Cobble Hill with her husband.



Fourth Grade

Kim Tulloch
4-415 CTT

Kim, a teacher of more than a decade, is back at PS 261 after leaving in 2005. She has taught first, second, third, and fourth grades—and science! Kim keeps busy with her own two kids (graduates of PS 261), photography and teaching martial arts—she is a third-degree black belt in tae kwon do. Kim received a Bachelor's in Dance and Theater



Education and her Master's in Aesthetic Education, both from Hunter College. She is working on a second Master's in Transformative Literacy.

Anne Farmer
4-413

Anne began at PS 261 in 2005 after working in Washington Heights where she taught both third and fourth grades for two years. She grew up in Massachusetts and, after four years in Manhattan, calls Brooklyn home. She received her Bachelor's in History from Wellesley College and a Master's in Early Childhood and Elementary Education from New York University.



She loves teaching for the good discussions, the privilege of helping kids become good people, and the totally unexpected. Anne likes to sew—and has even tried skydiving!

Scott Howard
4-414

Mr. Scott loves teaching because he likes “the chance to be able to really get to know another person who's younger than me.” He has a Bachelor's in English and Sociology from the University of Michigan and a Master's in Elementary Education from Columbia University. Mr. Scott has been at PS 261 since 2002. He grew up in Rochester, plays the piano and he *loves* to ski.



Allisyn Levy
4-424

Allisyn has a Bachelor's in Elementary Education from Skidmore College and a Master's in School Administration of Educational Technology from Western Washington University. She has been teaching for a decade and at PS 261 since 2003. Allisyn used to teach technology at our school and she loves making books and videos and doing photography with her students.



Becca Sacra
4-415 CTT

This is Becca's third year in her own classroom at PS 261. She received her Bachelor's in Childhood Education/Special Education and Psychology and her Master's in In-Service Childhood Education concentrating in both Math and Literacy, both from New York University. Originally from the Boston area, Becca lives in Windsor Terrace and enjoys cooking, traveling, volunteering, and hiking.



Sherley Ayala
3/4-311

This is Miss Ayala's first year at PS 261—as a teacher. Her twin daughters graduated last spring, so she's very familiar with our community. Miss Ayala was an attorney in private practice for a decade before she became a New York City Teaching Fellow. She has a B.A. in Psychology from the University of Illinois in Chicago and a J.D. from Rutgers University in Newark. She expects to receive her Master's in Special Education from Brooklyn College in June 2008. Miss Ayala lives in East Flatbush and enjoys tinkering in her garden and spending time with her family.



Fifth Grade



Marie Deforges
5-411 CTT

This is Marie's first year as a classroom teacher but she worked at PS 261 for the two previous years as a paraprofessional. She has a B.A. in Psychology from Medgar Evers College and is working on dual certification in Special and General Education in the Master's program at Tuoro

College. A Brooklyn native, Marie lives in East Flatbush now and enjoys tennis and reading in her spare time.



Jook Leung
5-412

As a teacher, Jook "facilitates ways for children to discover for themselves." He finds the upper grades a turning point for children as they start to think beyond elementary school. In addition to being with his wife and two children, Jook enjoys

cooking, reading, and photography. He oversees the publication of the fifth grade yearbook. He received his Bachelor's in English Literature from Stony Brook University and a Master's in Elementary Education from Bank Street College. Jook has worked at PS 261 since 1995.



Denise Harding
5-419

Denise joined PS 261 in 2005 after teaching third grade for three years at PS 299 in Bushwick. Prior to teaching, Denise worked in television advertising for 13 years. She received her Bachelor's in Business Management and Finance from Brooklyn College and her Master's in Elementary Education

from Pace University. A native of Trinidad, Denise lives in Prospect Heights. She loves martial arts and tennis.

Jennifer Best
5-409



Jennifer has been teaching for nearly 10 years and joined us in 2004. She received her Bachelor's in American Literature and Education from Middlebury College and her Master's in Early Education from Hunter College. She loves to knit and is continuing the lunchtime knitting club. She also researches her family tree and works on crossword puzzles.



Nicole Blyden
5-411 CTT

Ms. Nicole, a native New Yorker who lives in Brooklyn, started at PS 261 in 2005 after three years teaching third and fifth grades at PS 158 in Brooklyn. She was previously a case manager in a domestic violence shelter for five years. Ms. Nicole is a NYC Teaching Fellow. She has a Bachelor's in Sociology from City College and a Master's in Childhood Education

from Brooklyn College. Ms. Nicole finds teaching important because she believe she is investing in the making of our future. She enjoys reading, dancing, and listening to music.



Erica Masaon
4/5-417

This is Erica's second year as a classroom teacher at PS 261, though she student-taught here for a year before that in special education. She received her Bachelor's in Psychology from Union College in Schenectady and her Master's in Childhood and Special Education at New York University.

Erica grew up in Westchester and now lives in Manhattan. She works to bring energy, creativity, and excitement to the classroom. "Because this age group is impressionable, I am able to have a profound and positive impact on my students' lives," she says. She enjoys sports, travel, and reading.

This annual PTA publication introduces PS 261's classroom teachers and teacher specialists. The directory this year was edited by parent Sasha Nyary, with photos by parent Bill Moree. Help came from Principal Zip Mills, with proofreading by parent Carole Kelly. Apologies for errors; corrections and questions may be directed to Sasha at awn4@columbia.edu or 917-804-4002.



Donald Harnick Physical Education.

After teaching fifth grade at PS 261 for a decade, Don is now our P.E. teacher. Don received his Bachelor's in Education from Brooklyn College. He has three daughters. One is a fourth grade teacher and two are twins who just graduated from college.



Stephanie Scarborough Visual Arts

Ms. S. comes to PS 261 this year from Orlando, Florida, where she taught kindergarten and third grade for a decade. She received a B.A. in Psychology and a Master's in Education from Rollins College in Winter Park, FL. Ms. S. has a grown daughter and three dogs and lives in Cobble Hill.

Jessica Oakley Science

"I like to challenge students to interact, think, create, and solve problems," says Jessica, who has previously taught in California, Manhattan and Brooklyn. She received her Bachelor's in Environmental Science from the University of Colorado at Boulder, and her Master's in Science, Math and Leadership from Bank Street College. She came to PS 261 in 2003.



Becky Ponka Music

Miss Becky was graduated from Hope College in Holland, Mich., with a Bachelor of Music in Music Education in 1998. She received a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership from Wayne State University in Detroit, which is where she grew up. She began teaching at PS 261 in 2003.

Christopher Peyser Information Literacy

Bronx-born and Miami-raised, Chris came to PS 261 in 2004. Chris has a Bachelor's in Fine Arts from Columbia University, a Master's in Film and Animation from California Institute of the Arts and a Master's in Elementary Education from Lehman College.



Teacher Specialists

Carmelo Piazza Science

Carmelo, "the Science Fellow," has taught science at PS 261 since 1996. Teaching science is his calling. With a Bachelor's in Elementary Education and Nutrition from Brooklyn College and a Master's in Environmental Education, Carmelo is committed to encouraging more science in the classroom. Carmelo is getting married this fall.



Joel Brooks Technology & Music

Mr. Brooks began teaching upper grades at PS 261 more than 30 years ago. He met his wife, Sheila, here when they were both young teachers. He taught music for 12 years, and computers for more than 20. He also coordinates our opera program, which allows several classes each year to attend a dress rehearsal at the Metropolitan Opera. He has a Bachelor's in Education and a Master's in Education with a specialty in Music from Brooklyn College.



Karyn Fessler-West Movement

Karyn has been teaching for nearly two decades, almost all of it Physical Education, but also art and second grade. Previously a professional dancer, she has taught dance since she was 17. Karyn has a Bachelor's in Biology from Wagner College and is working on her Master's in Liberal Arts Education from Excelsior. She came to PS 261 in 2002.



Megan Kane Visual Arts

Miss Megan received her Bachelor's in Visual Arts with a concentration in Ceramics from the State University of New York at New Paltz. She grew up in Brooklyn and lives in Queens. Miss Megan has also taught art in afterschool and weekend programs. She has been at PS 261 since 2005.

