

## SJA ALUMNI WHO BECAME TEACHERS

We apologize if we missed naming other alumni who are teachers.  
Below the list are a handful of reflections of SJA Alums.

Penny Fitzgerald '57  
Sally Root McIntosh '59  
Nancy Tuszynski Nolan '59  
Sally Schulte Staff '61  
Dee Dee Owens Maloney '62  
Margaret Romano Blackburn '64  
Bruce Brandel '64  
Mary Romano Marks '66  
Gail Smith Hulse '66  
Sue Sackley Mullin '67  
Ginny Romano Zemsteff '69  
Jack Schufreider '70  
Donna Cassie '71  
JoAnn Pierotti Tennenbaum '73  
Susan Balmes '75  
Linda Zemsteff '75  
Michael Zemsteff '76  
Patricia Romano Meegan '79  
Mort Schufreider '79  
Ellen Gleixner Wozny '80  
Robert Bernstein '81  
Shannon Woodward Haughey '83  
Monica Ptak '84  
Kevin Roxas '84  
Carlo Trovato '84  
Missy Ryan '85  
Kim Ryan '86  
Beth O'Keefe Davoren '87  
Ryan Healy '88  
Margaret Bernstein '89  
Janet Vitale '89

Priya Sharma Amin '90  
Greg Taylor '90  
Meghan McClelland Espinoza '91  
Jenny Wilbur Hillman '92  
Michelle McClelland Corrigan '93  
Molly Nelson Harris RIP '93  
Natalie Oertel Pike '93  
James Allen '94  
Mary Schaefer Steingraber '94  
Megan Stevens LaLonde '94  
Laurie Zajackowski '94  
Jimmy Ford '96  
Becky Maloney Cochran '96  
Callie Kozlak Tyler '96  
Michael Hendricks '98  
Casey Woodward Marx '98  
Molly Schneider Kenemore '99  
Gerit Nora McAllister '00  
Michaela Sheehan '00  
Emily Schomisch '01  
Katie Schultz '02  
Katie Friedrich Harkna '04  
Laken Andrews '06  
Keeley Barr '06  
Erin Rowell '06  
Christine Betterman '08  
Casey Digan '08  
Grace Haughey '12  
Catherine Kane '14  
Colleen King '14

### GAIL SMITH HULSE '66

*What inspired you to become a teacher?*

Playing school with my older cousin- she was the best teacher!

*Did your years at SJA influence your decision?*

Back in the day with 30-50 students in the class, there was the good, like Sr. Selma and Sr. Pious;



the bad and the ugly - we'll leave them nameless. It couldn't help but influence and want to make you a good teacher.

*What do you like best about teaching?*

I loved the constantly changing and challenging dynamics of a room (or as principal, a school) full of children with a goal of helping them achieve excellence.

*Can you share a moment that stands out that reaffirmed your passion for teaching?*

There was a 6th grader who came to my principal's office with his mentor to ask me to accept him as a student. He was quiet and nervous but explained he couldn't learn where he was b/c his friends expected him to not be "a student" but just an athlete and he struggled with reading. He said his classroom was out of order and he couldn't concentrate. I accepted him for the coming school year on scholarship and watched him work his tail off to catch up, watched his teachers and classmates and even their parents support him for the next two years. I applauded as he graduated from Loyola Academy and went on to college. Teachers make a world of difference.

### **JACK SCHUFREIDER '70**

*What inspired you to become a teacher?*

I had a number of great teachers and coaches at Loyola Academy that made teaching seem interesting.

*Did your years at SJA influence your decision?*

I always enjoyed the sports I played at SJA. Jeff Golub opened us up to all sports, even boxing and floor hockey. That certainly helped make me interested in coaching others.



*What do you like best about teaching?*

I'm no longer a classroom teacher but a coach. But helping kids achieve their goals, and seeing the joy in them when they have success is very gratifying.

*Can you share a moment that stands out that reaffirmed your passion for teaching?*

I had a player that came in as a freshman and was very shy and introverted. Also, very weak as a basketball player. Four years later he was one of our captains and is a leader in the school - both on and off the court. It's for kids like this that I still work in the gym.

### **JOANN PIEROTTI TENNENBAUM '73**

*What inspired you to become a teacher?*

I have always loved kids even when I was young. I used to have a summer camp in my backyard and charged my neighbors fifty cents a child to watch them for a few hours. I had activities and snacks for all the children.

*Did your years at SJA influence your decision?*

I would not stop talking and always got into trouble for that and for moving around. I thought maybe I could handle kids like me in a more positive way. Today, we have much better strategies for ADD kids.

*What do you like best about teaching?*

I LOVED teaching. When you finally saw the light in a child's eyes as they struggled to understand something and then they say, "I got it!" - that was awesome!

*Can you share a moment that stands out that reaffirmed your passion for teaching?*

When it was time to retire, I was actually sad about it. I kept going back as a substitute because I missed the kids and I missed being able to make a difference.

### **MICHAEL ZEMSTEFF '76**

*What inspired you to become a teacher?*

My dad, who was a teacher and became an assistant principal.

*What do you like best about teaching?*

Educating young minds (El Ed Teacher); Teaching not only the basics, but also how to be a productive member of society.

*Can you share a moment that stands out that reaffirmed your passion for teaching?*

Every time I coached a sport (many) and headed after-school programs for minimal pay, maximum hours, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

### **KIM RYAN '86**

*What inspired you to become a teacher?*

Becoming a teacher just sort of fell in my lap ~ I've never looked back & enjoy it immensely! When I retired, I was asked to substitute teach at St. Joan of Arc and was then offered a full-time position teaching art for the Academy at St. Joan of Arc.



*Did your years at SJA influence your decision?*

The decision to accept a teaching position was made that much easier because it was at St. Joan of Arc.

*What do you like best about teaching?*

The look on a child's face when they "get it" is like nothing else! It is so gratifying to watch the joy that comes over them when something "clicks."

*Can you share a moment that stands out that reaffirmed your passion for teaching?*  
Seeing the utter joy that comes over a child when they master a skill is priceless ~ that's what makes it all worthwhile.

### **BETH O'KEEFE DAVOREN '87**

*What inspired you to become a teacher?*

My Mom, Margaret O'Keefe who taught 1<sup>st</sup> grade at St Francis for many years and continues to volunteer one day a week. 😊

*Did your years at SJA influence your decision?*

It definitely had a hand in my decision. Having multiple teachers that took the time to teach things in multiple ways to address all the different learners in my classroom. I liked that it was and is a place where it is encouraged to try many things, I believe this is important as children learn what is best for them.



*What do you like best about teaching?*

I like setting goals with students and guiding them to reach them. Then taking the time to reflect on the process and share success.

*Can you share a moment that stands out that reaffirmed your passion for teaching?*

Seeing the smile on the face of a 2nd grader when they realized they were reading on their own!

### **JENNY WILBUR HILLMAN '92**

*What inspired you to become a teacher?*

I had some fantastic teachers at SJA. But Mrs. Hamilton was definitely the reason I pursued teaching. She made the 2nd grade year quite memorable and made everyone feel important at every chance she could get. I remember how she made such a big deal when you showed up to school with new shoes or a fresh haircut. On Fridays after a spelling test she made Kool-Aid.



*Did your years at SJA influence your decision?*

There are definite memories that I have from SJA that have inspired me to be a teacher. The teachers cared so much for the students and made each year special. Pre-school-the amazing plays! Wizard of Oz with refrigerator boxes at the scenery, Kindergarten-celebrating Mrs. Baer's 30th birthday with blue freezy pops, 1st grade-the Nativity and students sitting on Ms. Morris' desk to read out loud, 2nd grade-Mrs. Hamilton, 4th grade sports!, 6th grade-puppet shows and feeling like you were a real scientist, 7th grade-junior high, 8th grade-we ruled the school.

*What do you like best about teaching?*

I began my career at St Joan's for 5 years. I made amazing friends that I still lean on today. I was a first grade teacher but it wasn't where I thought I was meant to be. I thought I should have been in an older grade. But I fell in love with primary that first year. I was amazed at how much the kiddos grew up in that year. They were little guys in August and amazing readers by June. I love helping children grow and reaching their goals. When I left St Joan's I became a reading teacher for 6 years, but I have found my way back to first grade and now in 2nd grade. I hope this is where I stay. 2nd grade is where I was meant to be. Hopefully I am making Mrs. Hamilton proud...I do always try to pick out the new shoes and the haircuts when I see them.

*Can you share a moment that stands out that reaffirmed your passion for teaching?*

When former students come back to visit, I love to hear what they are up to.

#### **MARY SCHAEFER STEINGRABER '94**

*Did your years at SJA influence your decision?*

The educators at St. Joan of Arc profoundly influenced my decision to pursue teaching. I have vivid memories of learning (and getting into trouble) alongside my lifelong best friends. The exceptional sense of community at SJA, where care and unity prevail, left an indelible mark. Now, as a parent, I seek a similar nurturing environment for my children, where they can thrive and feel like part of a caring family.

Eight years ago, I unexpectedly encountered my 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Ms. Vanessa Payton, at a professional development event. During introductions, while everyone shared their roles as learning specialists, my nerves and excitement overshadowed my coherence. All I managed to convey to the group was the memory of attending HER wedding three decades prior with my friends.



## MEGAN STEVENS LALONDE '94

*What inspired you to become a teacher?*

I always loved playing school and I love kids. I enjoyed being around little ones and after babysitting and being a camp counselor, I knew I wanted to make a career of helping little ones grow.

*Did your years at SJA influence your decision?*

Mrs. Hamilton was a huge influence on my decision to be a 2nd grade teacher. I had her when she was going through breast cancer, and she still made it to school when she could and made 2nd grade the best year ever. She was such a role model to me, she was always kind, and patient, even when we pushed her every button. When I became a 2nd grade teacher, I sent her a note telling her she was my inspiration to teach the best grade ever. I thought of her at the start of every school year in 2nd grade.



*What do you like best about teaching?*

I love the connections you build with your students and the ability to watch them grow from August to June. I love when the little lightbulb comes on for a concept they struggled with, or when they read that first page of a book perfectly. I just love being part of their journey through life!

*Can you share a moment that stands out that reaffirmed your passion for teaching?*

I think one of the most reaffirming things for me is just all the students who come back to see me after they have moved on. I was also even chosen by a former student to be his confirmation sponsor and I was so honored.

## CALLIE KOZLAK TYLER '96

*What inspired you to become a teacher?*

I have always loved school and learning, thanks in large part to my active parents and the supportive community at SJA. In becoming a teacher, I ultimately wanted to share that passion with students and do something tangible to support student learning and development.

*Did your years at SJA influence your decision?*

Yes, as mentioned above, my positive experience at SJA set a foundation for a love of learning and the school environment.



*What do you like best about teaching?*

When my students demonstrated that they had mastered a skill we were working on. I also loved reading stories and getting to relive memorable literature with them.

*Can you share a moment that stands out that reaffirmed your passion for teaching?*

I remember doing a series of lessons on voting. It was unclear if the students were grasping the concept or enjoying the content. After several weeks, one of the quieter students chimed in and answered questions perfectly about how voting registration works. The students also began calculating when they would be eligible to vote. My heart was so happy!

### **MICHAEL HENDRICKS '98**

*What inspired you to become a teacher?*

During my time at Georgetown, I took a course titled Church and the Poor. As part of the class, we had to engage in community work that promoted social justice. I chose to tutor in the housing projects of Northeast D.C. It was there where I fell in love with teaching and working with students, particularly those from underserved communities. In addition, growing up with a mom and aunt who were both teachers at SJA definitely helped fuel my fire and passion for this work!



*Did your years at SJA influence your decision?*

Absolutely. The sense of community, the traditions, and the shared mission at SJA were instrumental in shaping me into the type of person that I am today. The SJA model has been a guidepost for how I think about leading exceptional schools for kids. In addition, there were so many educators that had such a profound impact on me academically, but perhaps more importantly, in shaping my character. Mrs. Hamilton's hugs and positive affirmations, and Mrs. Nagawiecki's standard of excellence for top quality work and constant reinforcement of what it means to be kind continue to guide how I lead and why I do this work.

*What do you like best about teaching?*

I love the opportunity to set a high bar for students and see them rise to that bar. I opened a school as a Founding Principal in East New York, Brooklyn with 100% low-income students of color. By the time my students graduated 8th grade they were performing in the top 5% in the state for math and ELA, outperforming the wealthiest districts in New York state.

*Can you share a moment that stands out that reaffirmed your passion for teaching?*

As a principal, I led a "pie" day every year where students had to memorize as many digits as they could from pi. Students who had memorized over 100 digits were able to pie the teacher of their choice in the face. Needless to say, I was the first one chosen. This

experience epitomizes my "why" - the joy and rigor that comes alive with students in schools.

### **CASEY WOODWARD MARX '98**

*What inspired you to become a teacher?*

I don't really know what inspired me to be a teacher! I always played school growing up in my parents' basement. I always adored kids. I could not have been more thrilled and prouder to be an aunt. and I suppose after trying many other fields, I figured I don't ALWAYS need to make things more complicated! Teaching for me was just always easy, fluid, natural.

*Did your years at SJA influence your decision?*

Mrs. Hamilton, Mrs. Nagawiecki and Mr. Livatino most certainly had an impact on my decision to pursue teaching. I always felt truly seen by them and with that sense of trust and care, I both appreciated and was motivated by their high expectations. I keep that at the forefront of my own teaching philosophy to this day. If the little humans who come into my classroom each day feel safe, loved and accepted...then the gentle nudges from me to push past discomfort in order to reach their highest potential are welcomed. Simple yet profound stuff!

*What do you like best about teaching?*

Seventeen years into teaching 3, 4 and 5 year olds, mostly in the private sector, having my own three babies along the way, teaching through a pandemic and all the other difficult messiness of life, I can confidently say the education field is due for a major revamp. The world is different, family structures are different, technology and children's exposure are different, and brains are evolving differently...which leads me to my favorite part of education/teaching. I am fortunate enough to be at a point in my career where longevity allows me to feel genuine confidence in my own abilities and impact but still have that hunger and eagerness to do more. I have been doing this just long enough that I feel inspired and excited to jump in and ignite much needed change and lean into the discomfort.

*Can you share a moment that stands out that reaffirmed your passion for teaching?*

In August of 2021, after only ever attending AND teaching in private schools (and admittedly trying to get any other job from sales to interior design for several years prior) I took a job at a local at-risk Preschool for All program. The deciding factor was thinking at least I'd cut hours out of my commute while continue to navigate what is "next" for me and my own little family. Three years later, the actual act of teaching remains close to impossible largely due to the embarrassing lack of funding and increased demands that are placed in educators; but I know this is it for me. I come from so much privilege compared to the children I teach, but it's these children and their families who I truly learn from every. single. day. I'm an infinitely better educator, momma and human since this new adventure and cannot accurately express the gratitude I feel for the honor to learn alongside these children (and their villages). Not sure there is more evidence of reignited passion than that! 🥰

## GERIT NORA MCALLISTER '00

*What inspired you to become a teacher?*

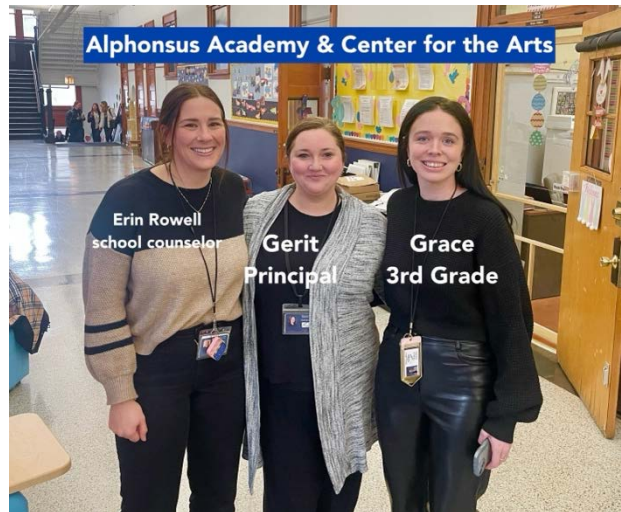
My teachers at SJA inspired me to be a teacher. They were such incredible people that made me love school.

*Did your years at SJA influence your decision?*

Yes, definitely. It was such a wonderful community. I felt that I could be myself and reach my goals and I wanted to be part of that for others.

*What do you like best about teaching?*

My favorite thing about education is when you reach that hard-to-reach student and get through their shell.



## LAKEN ANDREWS '06

*What inspired you to become a teacher?*

I have always known that I wanted to work with children, but I never thought I wanted to be a teacher. After college, I joined City Year Chicago which is a one-year AmeriCorps program. Through City Year, I served as a tutor and mentor in a Chicago public high school, and I stayed on for a 2nd year as a Team Leader. Through this program and working in a school, I saw so many children that needed an adult in their corner to advocate and fight for them. I knew that I wanted to be that support system and one way to do it would be by becoming a teacher. I decided that I wanted to continue the path toward becoming a teacher and joined Teach for America.

*Did your years at SJA influence your decision?*

My time at SJA is what developed my love of working with children. The close-knit community gave me so many opportunities to work with children, specifically through babysitting. While I know babysitting may not seem directly related to the education I received at SJA, SJA is about more than classroom education, it is about community. The families at SJA gave me opportunities to develop my interests at a young age and fostered my sense of responsibility. Special shout out to the Lynk family for giving 10-year-old me a chance!



Of course, I had teachers that I still think about today and that I attempt to emulate in my own teaching practices. I often think back to my 3rd grade teacher Ms. Mennen and how she always made learning fun through class themes, class inside jokes (pickle pancakes), personally designed puzzles, and Math 500. I would be lucky to be half the teacher she was.

*What do you like best about teaching?*

My favorite part about teaching is the students that you get to know and work with. You get to see students grow in many ways which is very rewarding. There is no greater feeling than seeing a student finally grasp a concept that you have been trying to teach them. Not only do you feel proud of them, but you can see how proud they are of themselves. At the end of the year the students move on to the next grade, but you get to see how they take the skills you taught them into their next grade level. Even as students continue to move up in grades, they will see you in the hallway and continue to share their proudest moments with you.

*Can you share a moment that stands out that reaffirmed your teaching?*

My first year of teaching, I was a special education teacher in a 7th grade class with students that had behavior and academic issues. I had absolutely no idea what I was doing and how I was going to best support the students. Over the course of the year, we had many tough moments with each other, but I was able to see the students grow in ways that didn't feel probable seeing how tough the beginning of our year went. I was able to help my students develop coping mechanisms and ways to safely address their emotions. I continued with the same group of students through their 8th grade year, and I was able to see them move on to high school with the new skills they gained during our time together. Not only did the students grow, but I was also able to grow into a more patient, understanding teacher. Flash forward to today, I have been able to see three different groups of students that I have worked with move on to high school and grow into the people they are today. Knowing that I had a hand in that, has reaffirmed my choice in becoming a teacher.

## **GRACE HAUGHEY '12** **(Niece of Casey Woodward Marx)**

*What inspired you to become a teacher?*

I've always wanted to be a teacher! I grew up with four little siblings and I always played school with them. I also lived in a neighborhood with a ton of younger children, so I was always babysitting, and I realized that from a young age that being around kids, having fun with them, and making a difference in their lives was something I've always wanted to do.



*Did your years at SJA influence your decision?*

My years at SJA had a huge influence on why I wanted to be an elementary school teacher. Specifically, Ms. Wilbur, my 1st grade teacher, was someone who believed in me every day (even when it was hard, because I did struggle) and she made each of us in her class feel loved and important. I'm almost 26 now, and I still try to be like her every day! She embodied everything I want to be as an educator. Patient, kind, caring, and inclusive.

*What do you like best about teaching?*

What I love about teaching is that it is a job where I get affirmed every day. The love and joy I have being around my students is reciprocated. When I get excited about topics we are learning, or just events going on in our own lives, they get equally excited. Being greeted by their smiling faces each morning is something I would never trade in. They're my little best friends!

*Can you share a moment that stands out that reaffirmed your passion for teaching?*

A moment that stands out that reaffirms my passion for teaching just happened recently. We had done a unit on space, and all of my girls went to the Planetarium for Girl Scouts. The people at the Planetarium were asking everyone questions about what they know about space, and my girls were eagerly raising their hands, saying facts from Galileo to Apollo 11 to the JFK we choose the moon speech. The person working was impressed and asked them "how do you guys know all this" and one of them responded "because my teacher loves it and she taught us all about it". To see that they are excited about applying their learning elsewhere (even when I'm not around) is really the greatest!

**TEACHERS ROCK!!**