

COE AA Presentation Fall 2025

FACULTY AND STAFF TRANSITIONS

Good afternoon. To begin, I am pleased to share some news about faculty and staff with new appointments in the College of Education. While the list you see is arranged alphabetically by first name, I'll speak about them by category.

I'll start with two new teachers in our Child Development Center. **Arianna Rivera**, a recent graduate of our early childhood education program, brings prior experience as an instructional assistant. She has been exceptionally well-prepared, and we welcome her to this new position.

Kate D'Apolito began as a teacher in the Center midway through last academic year, after changing from a career in business. Kate earned her undergraduate degree in business and her MBA from WP, and is now enrolled in the alternate route P-3 teacher certification program.

We also welcomed **Katie Whalen** as the new associate director of the Child Development Center. Katie has taken on the critical responsibilities of managing day-to-day operations and supervising staff, and she has done a terrific job over the summer to prepare for the school year.

Moving now from 1800 to 1600 Valley Road, we have **Ally Larena**, our graduate programs advisor. Ally is also a recent WP graduate, having earned her master's degree in school counseling. As graduate program enrollment in the College of Education has risen dramatically—something I'll say more about shortly—it's hard to imagine where we would be without Ally. She is deeply valued by our students, faculty, and staff alike.

Turning to faculty, **Cassi Deighan** is our new full-time instructor in special education. She has hit the ground running as director of our Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant program. Cassi holds multiple graduate credentials from WP and has been a trusted adjunct faculty member for many years.

Jameelah Wright, who began as a pre-doctoral fellow in early childhood education, received her doctorate and has now been appointed to a tenure-track assistant professor position. This fall, she also became director of the undergraduate early childhood education program. We are incredibly proud that Jameelah was recently awarded the *Outstanding Dissertation Award* from the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators.

Finally, **Scott Scardena**, who served as a full-time instructor last year, has now joined us as a tenure-track assistant professor of professional counseling, having successfully defended his dissertation just weeks ago. Scott has already become an integral member of the professional counseling faculty.

Next, I am thrilled to announce two newly tenured faculty in the College of Education, **Anita Kumar** and **Gigi Mohamad**. Anita directs our preschool-to-grade-3 alternate route teacher certification program, which has grown exponentially under her leadership. She has also been

instrumental in securing and maintaining major grants to support paraprofessionals on the path to teacher certification.

Gigi, who originally came to WP for her expertise in school library media and educational technology, has proven herself a capable and committed director of our doctoral program in leadership. Both Anita and Gigi are woven into the fabric of the College of Education and are models of leadership and dedication.

POINTS OF PRIDE AND OPPORTUNITIES

The three photos on this slide capture some of the most important points of pride and opportunities for the College of Education.

At the top is a photo from our **Aspiring Educators Program** this past summer. Sixty-four high school students participated, mentored by certified teachers from surrounding districts as they worked with elementary students on English language arts and math enrichment. Under Associate Dean Fuentes' leadership, this program has grown dramatically since its founding four summers ago, when just twelve students participated.

Today, the program draws from a wider range of districts and adapts each year to meet the needs of students. Participants learn from diverse, expert faculty and from skilled, compassionate staff. Thanks to strong private and public funding support, these students receive college credit and a generous stipend—helping them see themselves as teachers of tomorrow.

The photo at the bottom left shows “**A Partnership Powerhouse**,” a wall display outside our Office of Field Experiences and Partnerships. It highlights the College's extensive collaborations with schools and organizations throughout the region. Next month, we are co-sponsoring the *School-University Partnership Powerhouse Conference* with the New Jersey Association of School-University Partnerships.

This semester, nearly 275 partner schools host our teacher candidates for field-based learning, alongside 9 school counseling and 13 mental health counseling partner sites. In addition, we have professors-in-residence at 50 professional development schools in Northern New Jersey. Expanding and deepening these partnerships will remain a major priority in our upcoming strategic plan.

Finally, the photo at the bottom right shows five graduates of our **Early Childhood Education Program for Paraprofessionals**. These students were able to maintain their employment while earning the academic credentials required for teacher certification. Increasingly, students like them are eligible for both financial and academic support through public and private funding sources we have secured. Revenue generation through partnerships with the Office of Sponsored Programs and Advancement is a significant achievement—and also a reminder of the need for sustainable financing in a shifting funding landscape.

OTHER NOTED ACHIEVEMENTS

The College of Education has been part of **WP Online** since its inception in 2020. Our faculty in higher education administration and educational leadership were among the very first to adopt this new online delivery model, setting a foundation for growth.

Today, the College offers 11 graduate certificate programs and 13 master's degree programs through WP Online. These include the MA in Higher Education Administration, MAT programs in both Elementary and Secondary Education—through both traditional and alternate-route pathways—and MEd programs in Educational Leadership, Special Education, Literacy, School Library Media, and the Teaching of Writing for Grades P–12.

Our graduate certificate programs can stand alone or be stacked into a master's degree, offering flexibility for working professionals. Additional programs are on track for launch in spring 2026, with others in development for the years ahead.

REFLECTIONS ON OUR SECTOR IN HIGHER EDUCATION

I'll now reflect for a moment on both the promise and the challenges facing teacher preparation in higher education.

On the promising side, we see innovative models such as **residencies** and **registered apprenticeships** transforming how individuals enter the profession. These models bridge the traditional divide between theory in the university and practice in the classroom. In states such as Texas and Tennessee—and here at William Paterson with our own teacher registered apprenticeship program—we've seen that when financial barriers are removed and candidates are paid as they learn, a more diverse and talented pool of future teachers emerges.

But the challenges are real. Federal cuts to teacher preparation grants have forced universities and school districts to adapt quickly. Sustainability is a constant concern: how do we ensure these pathways are not short-lived experiments, but lasting solutions?

The answer, as research and experience suggest, lies in **collaboration and adaptability**. Universities cannot do this work alone. Partnerships with districts, state agencies, and workforce boards are essential. Embedding program costs into ongoing budgets and demonstrating the return on investment—such as stronger teacher retention—can help make these models permanent.

Here at William Paterson, partnerships of this nature are not only part of our present, but also central to our strategic vision moving forward.

When you receive today's slides, you'll notice that hyperlinks appear when you hover over the images of these articles, so you can explore them further.

HEADLINES IN 2030

Finally, I want to close with three aspirational—and I truly believe achievable—headlines for 2030.

William Paterson University and Paterson Public Schools celebrate ‘earn-and-learn’ teacher pathway partnership: Debt-free BA for scores of district paraprofessionals

This headline envisions a future where paraprofessionals already working in Paterson schools complete their bachelor's degrees debt-free, while continuing to earn an income. It would mean that the teachers of tomorrow are already in our classrooms today—deeply rooted in their communities, and better prepared because of their ongoing experience alongside formal study.

Educational leaders and teachers across NJ attest to the value of preparation via WP Online

By 2030, we anticipate our online programs will not only be widely recognized but celebrated for their quality, flexibility, and impact. Graduates from across New Jersey—and beyond—will be pointing to WP Online as the reason they could both advance their careers and maintain balance in their lives.

William Paterson University's multi-district teacher apprenticeship hub in Northern New Jersey cited as statewide model for expansion and retention of teacher workforce

This headline captures the kind of leadership we are working toward: a model in which WP serves as the hub for teacher apprenticeships across multiple districts. Not only would such a hub strengthen recruitment, it would also address the critical issue of retention by providing candidates with mentorship, practical experience, and financial stability from day one. A statewide model of this kind would position WP as both a leader and a collaborator in shaping the future of the teaching profession.

I look forward to working with all of you—our terrific faculty, staff, and campus colleagues—to make these headlines a reality.

And now, I'm delighted to turn things over to Dean Anthony Bowrin of the Cotsakos College of Business.