

Education Department Newsletter

SEPTEMBER 2025



MACS Practicum

During the fall semester, third-year education majors completed their practicum hours at Manchester Academic Charter School (MACS), where they provided valuable support in both small-group and whole-class instruction in math and literacy. Teachers and students truly enjoyed having them in their classrooms! The La Roche students even participated in the “Dress Like Your Favorite Book Character Day” at MACS. See if you can guess the characters in the pictures!



Providence Heights Alpha School

The Providence Heights Alpha School is located next to the La Roche University campus, and we have enjoyed lots of opportunities to collaborate for educational events throughout the years. We are sad that the 2024-2025 school year was the last for the Alpha School, but we made the best of our time together.

This past fall, La Roche education majors facilitated math games and read alouds in the first grade classrooms at the Alpha School while the teachers completed beginning of the year assessments with individual students. Several La Roche students also fulfilled their initial field experience hours in classrooms at the Alpha School.

In the spring, La Roche education majors led Junior Achievement lessons from Kindergarten through 8th grade at the Alpha School. Furthermore, the 5th grade Alpha students came to the La Roche campus for some math games as part of the Intermediate Math Methods course a few times this spring.

The event we will miss the most is the annual Alpha Day, when all of the students from the Alpha School would visit La Roche for the entire day, participating in a variety of activities planned by La Roche faculty and staff.



MAT Action Research

On December 9th, students in the Master of Arts in Teaching program proudly showcased their Action Research presentations to an engaged audience of La Roche faculty and students. The presentations covered a range of topics—from incorporating technology in lesson plans to the creative use of flexible seating in classroom spaces. A big congratulations to Erin Kelly for earning this year's Action Research Award for her research project entitled, "Evaluating the Impact of Classroom Management Techniques on Reducing Disruptions."



Graduation Awards - May 2025

Once again, representatives of the Education Department were honored at the annual graduation awards ceremony. Graduating students nominated Dr. Michelle Ciansiosi-Rimbey to receive the Brother Gregory Nugent Teaching Award, which is a great way to recognize her caring and compassion for students inside and outside of the classroom. Elizabeth (Lizzie) Fite was the 2025 recipient of the Teacher Education Award. The students in Lizzie's future classrooms will certainly benefit from Lizzie's dedication to the teaching profession.





Study Abroad - London 2024

During August 2024, Dr. Rugg and Dr. Silvis led 11 students (including 4 education students) on a study abroad experience in London, England. They explored iconic landmarks such as Big Ben, Buckingham Palace, and the Tower of London, and visited the National Gallery, the Tate Modern, and the British Museum. Highlights included a Thames River cruise to Greenwich, where they straddled the Prime Meridian, a day trip to Windsor, and views from the London Eye.



Study Abroad – Greece 2025

During spring break, Dr. Andrea Peck and Dr. Michelle Rimbey traveled with 13 students to Athens, Greece. This one-credit course encompassed all aspects of Greece offering the perfect mix of history, food, exploration and relaxation. Each day the agenda was jam-packed with activities such as seeing the ruins, exploring islands and towns and tasting local delicacies. Every student experienced a rich learning experience and grew in more ways than one!



Exciting Opportunity in Deaf Education!

The La Roche Education Department is proud to be part of the newly launched Grow-Your-Own University Integrated Deaf Education (GUIDE) Program. This innovative initiative is a collaboration between DePaul School for Hearing and Speech, La Roche University, Robert Morris University, Utah State University, and Minot State University. Its mission is to prepare highly qualified teachers of the deaf through a unique training model.

Participants in the program will gain on-the-job experience working as an apprentice at DePaul School for Hearing and Speech while they simultaneously complete online coursework through the university consortium. In just one year, candidates will earn a Master of Arts in Deaf Education from La Roche, an apprenticeship certificate, and be eligible for teacher certification.

Interested in learning more? Contact Dr. Rugg at Natalie.Rugg@LaRoche.edu or view the brochure: <https://www.depaulhearingandspeech.org/guide/>

Pennsylvania Association for Middle Level Education State Conference 2025

Dr. Andrea Peck and the LRU Master of Arts in Teaching students attended PAMLE 2025, held from February 22-24 at the DoubleTree Pittsburgh – Greentree. The conference was a vibrant celebration of both fun and learning, designed specifically for middle level educators looking to make meaningful strides in their teaching practices. The theme, "Building Bridges and Futures," perfectly captured the spirit of the event, emphasizing the importance of fostering connections, creating new opportunities, and shaping the future of education. Throughout the conference, attendees engaged in a variety of dynamic sessions, workshops, and discussions led by passionate speakers and educators who were eager to share their knowledge and experiences. Whether it was exploring the latest strategies in classroom management, diving deep into innovative technology tools, or networking with fellow educators, the conference provided an environment where both professional growth and personal connections flourished. The interactive nature of the event meant that learning was not confined to just sessions—educators had the chance to collaborate, exchange ideas, and spark new friendships. The energy and enthusiasm from all involved created a space where learning was fun, engaging, and inspiring, leaving everyone with a renewed sense of purpose and tools to help them build stronger, more impactful futures for their students.



Future-Focused Learning Summit 2024

Dr. Andrea Peck and Dr. Michelle Rimbey spent the day at South Fayette Township School District on Monday, October 14, 2024 attending the first annual Future-Focused Learning Summit. The event focused on Transforming Learning with Artificial Intelligence (AI). The summit included pathways for K-12 teachers, administrators and higher education with opportunities for those who are new to AI and for those who are interested in expanding what they already know. This opportunity was full of collaboration and skill-building with a variety of resources and local leaders.



TEACH Conference 2025

The National State Teachers of the Year PA Chapter (NSTOY-PA) invited pre-service teachers, professors and educators to the TEACH mini-conference at Point Park University on Saturday, April 5.

The conference, “Waves of Teaching: Navigating the Ocean of Learning” was attended by all of the spring 2025 LRU student teachers and Dr. Andrea Peck. The event featured keynote speakers with motivational messages, engaging breakout sessions, mock interviews, opportunities for dialogue with professional educators, hands-on activities and door prizes. It was a full day of fun and learning!



Mock Monday

The LRU Education Department hosted “Mock Monday” on Monday, March 3rd. The event was sponsored by the Western Region of the Pennsylvania Association for Middle Level Education (WR-PAMLE) and was facilitated by Dr. Andrea Peck. All La Roche University as well as some local college/university education students who are currently student teaching were invited to participate. Attendees were split into breakout rooms every 20 minutes to meet with a variety of local elementary and middle level administrators, including principals, assistant principals and WRPAMLE board members. As they met they were asked a series of interview questions and provided immediate feedback.

This annual event helped students build confidence in speaking about their teaching philosophy and experiences, exposed them to “real” interview questions used by schools as well as prepared them for the 2025 PERC job fair that following week. There was also a debriefing session that took place at the end of the event to hear insider tips from the interviewers and ask questions. Many of the students commented that they felt more prepared for the upcoming interview season as a result of participating.

TeachFX

The spring 2025 student teachers and supervisors piloted a new AI-based technology called TeachFX. Using an app, teachers made audio recordings of their lessons. Then, TeachFX’s AI models analyzed each recording to give teachers positive feedback and support on their use of high-leverage instructional practices, such as open-ended questions, wait time, pressing students to explain their thinking, and behavior specific praise, as well as data about their teacher-student talk ratio, use of academic vocabulary, and more. The student teachers reflected several times on the data that they received to explain how they have grown and how their pedagogy impacted student performance. This research project opportunity was funded by the Gates Foundation and supported by the TeachFX administrators.



Alumni Updates

Morgan Waldroup '21

Morgan is in her third year teaching 5th and 6th grade Learning Support Math at PA Virtual Charter School. She loves seeing her students grow and succeed, even while learning from home, and enjoys meeting them in person at local outings across Pennsylvania. This spring brought a joyful new chapter—Morgan and her husband welcomed their first child, Luca Thomas, in April, and they are soaking up every moment as new parents.



Alyssa Hutsonpillar May '21

Life has been full of happy changes for Alyssa! She lives in Zelienople with her husband and golden retriever, Lincoln, and recently welcomed their daughter, Maryellen, in February 2025. Alyssa teaches 2nd grade in the Butler Area School District and loves inspiring her young students each day.



Hannah Smolensky '22

Hannah is finishing her second year as a 7th grade science teacher with Commonwealth Charter Academy, a role she loves for its blend of teaching and working from home. Earlier this year, she began a master's in Online Instruction at Slippery Rock University and is aiming to graduate in 2026. Outside of work and school, Hannah enjoys Pilates, hot yoga, and weight training. She recently got engaged, with wedding plans set for June 2026.



Kaitlyn Corcoran '20

Since graduating, Kaitlyn's journey has been filled with exciting milestones—marrying her husband, buying their first home, and starting her teaching career. She began as an emotional support teacher and now teaches K–2 special education in the Shaler Area School District. She recently earned her master's in Literacy and, in April, welcomed her son, Jameson. Kaitlyn credits La Roche for shaping both her professional skills and personal confidence, and she's grateful for the community that prepared her for each chapter that's followed.



Kailey Woistman Schupbach '20

Kailey began her career as a long-term substitute before stepping into her current role as a K–2 special education teacher at Penn Hills Charter School of Entrepreneurship. Now in her third year, she also serves on the school's Relationship and Safety Committees. In the past year, she celebrated earning her master's degree in Innovative Instruction from Seton Hill University and getting married. Kailey has also kept her lifelong passion for dance alive by teaching classes and encouraging creativity both in the studio and the classroom.



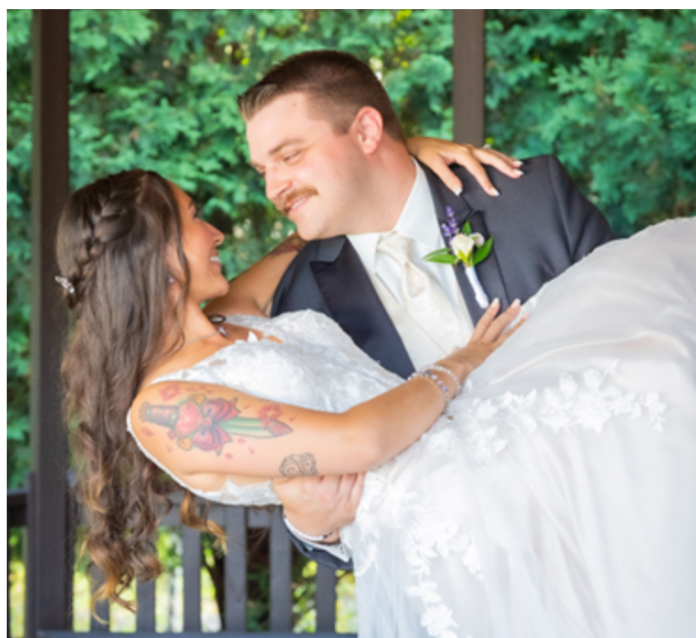
Hope Schreiber '17

Hope is making a difference as the 7–12 Assistant Principal and Virtual Vikings Online Academy Coordinator at Sto-Rox Jr./Sr. High School. In July 2024, she welcomed her daughter, Zoey Grace, and says motherhood has given her a fresh perspective on life and work. Outside of school, Hope is a proud member of the Pittsburgh Passion Women's Professional Tackle Football Team, which chased a spot in the WFA Championships this summer.



Kaimakani Tavares DiGioia '23, MAT

After graduating with her Master's in Middle Level Teaching in 2023, Kaimakani started teaching 7th grade math at Provident Charter School, a school specializing in students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities. She's enjoyed finding creative ways to make math engaging—like having her students design “equation clocks” after their algebra unit. In August 2024, she married her husband, marking a year filled with new beginnings.



Support the Next Generation of Educators

Every day, La Roche University's Education Department is preparing future teachers to inspire and lead in classrooms across our communities. Your gift helps keep class sizes small, fund scholarships, and provide hands-on experiences that shape outstanding educators.

Join us in making a difference—give today and help us continue shaping the future of education.

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