

# Farewell Dean Gajria

*This year Dean Meenakshi Gajria celebrates her retirement after working at St. Thomas Aquinas College for 35 years. After completing her PhD. in Special Education at Penn State University in 1988, Dean Gajria worked at SUNY New Paltz for three years before starting as an Assistant Professor at St. Thomas Aquinas College. She served the college in many capacities before becoming Dean in 2012. Tamson Foudy, BSEd. '23 and MEd. '24, pictured with Dean Gajria in the inset, writes about the many ways Dean Gajria has influenced the lives of her students.*

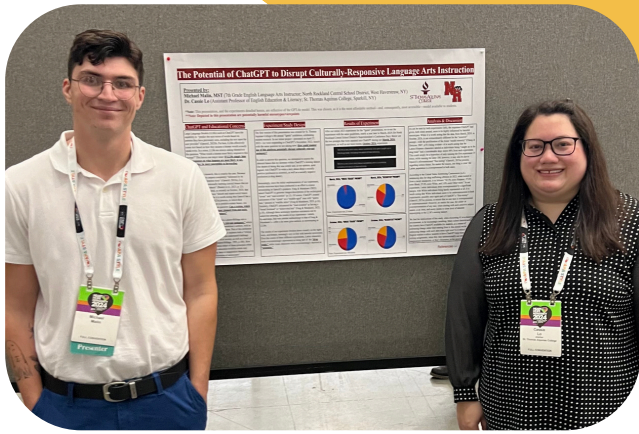
The care that Dr. Gajria has shown for each student has never gone unnoticed and has left a lasting impression on each one of us, which is something that makes the STAC experience so special and memorable. I speak for myself and so many in saying that I genuinely would not be the educator I am today or the one I will continue to grow into without Dr. Gajria's constant support, shared knowledge, enthusiasm, and love.

Dr. Gajria has given students comfort in knowing that there is no problem she cannot fix. Ryan Leiter, BSEd. '23 and MEd. '24, expresses that "Throughout my time as an undergraduate student, Dr. Gajria provided endless support through highs and lows across my professional and personal life. I came to learn very quickly that any problem can be solved with a conversation over a cup of tea."

Dr. Gajria shared with me that one of the best parts of working at STAC is seeing students grow and develop as teachers—from the time they attend an open house to the moment they walk across the stage at graduation. That feeling from Dr. Gajria is surely felt by each student. Not only does Dr. Gajria love the students she gets to work with, but she loves her team as well, as she expresses "What I really love is what I do, and the people I do it with."

That love is evident in everything Dr. Gajria has done for the SOE. In her retirement, Dr. Gajria plans on being more present in her grandchildren's lives, as well as traveling with her husband and friends. She has visited nearly all 50 states, and is making it her goal to visit them all!





# STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Michael Malin (MST English 7-12 & Students with Disabilities '24), English teacher in the North Rockland district, presented a poster with Dr. Lo on stereotype bias in AI at the National Council of Teachers of English annual conference in Boston on November 23, 2024.

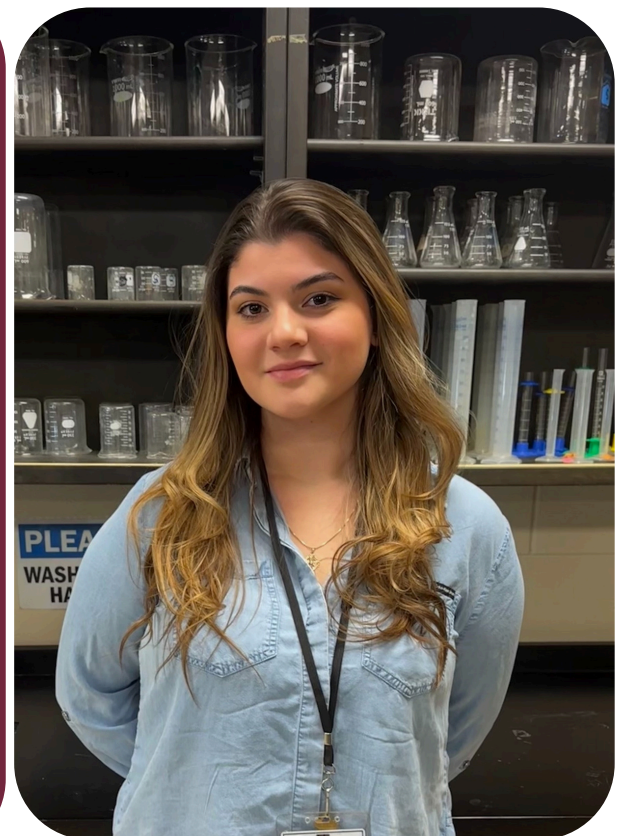
Stephanie Cuevas (BA Art Education) presented a poster titled "Effective Strategies for Promoting Civic Education and Its Importance!" at the annual conference of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) in Philadelphia on December 12, 2024.

## Student Voice

by Madison Mavrogiannis  
(MST Adolescent Education and Students with Disabilities)

Being given the opportunity to participate in the Teacher Residency Program at Clarkstown Central School District (CCSD) has allowed me to develop a full understanding of what it's like to be a teacher in 2025. My certification area is earth science, which I chose because of critical issues impacting our planet today like climate change. I believe that the students of today and in the near future need to understand the components of our planet in order to protect it.

Under the mentorship of two amazing earth science teachers, I get to see everything from lesson planning, co-teaching, differentiating instruction, and much more. My responsibilities in this program include attending Clarkstown South High School every day for all 8 periods in both special education and regular education settings. This experience has not only made me feel incredibly prepared for my future in teaching earth science but also ensured me that this is 100% the profession for me. It's one thing to take classes in education, do fieldwork, observe, and student teach, but it's a whole other thing to actually be an educator in your own classroom. I'm so grateful for this opportunity and the support through the Teacher Residency partnership St. Thomas Aquinas College has with CCSD. I'll always remember these classes as my first students ever, and am so excited for all the future students that I'm going to teach.







by McKayla Murphy, President  
(MSEd. Literacy B-12)

During the fall semester, Kappa Delta Pi (KDP) collaborated with the Education Club to host a vibrant and engaging Bingo Night. KDP also organized a successful coat drive, collecting warm clothing and essential materials for donation to both children and adults in need.

This semester we are excited to host our annual Induction Ceremony (Tuesday, April 8th), where we welcome new members into the esteemed ranks of Kappa Delta Pi. This will be followed by STAC's Honors Convocation and the launch of our spring service project. Don't forget to stay connected and updated on all KDP events and initiatives by following our Instagram account, @stac\_kdp.

KDP Leadership: Emma Hutta -Vice President,  
Alexis Krause - Secretary



Pictured Left-Right: Mckayla Murphy, Emma Hutta, John Seltzer, Gianna Longo, Abigail Horgan, Alanna Donohoe, Alyssa Liguori, Monica Martinez Blucher



## EDUCATION CLUB

By Monica Martinez Blucher, President  
(BSEd. Early Childhood and Childhood Education)

Left-Right: Monica Martinez Blucher (President), Gianna Longo (Social media co-manager), John Seltzer (Treasurer), Alanna Donohoe (Vice President), Abigail Horgan (Chief Justice), Alyssa Liguori (Social media co-manager), Elizabeth Sabino

The Education Club is a dynamic organization dedicated to supporting education majors and fostering professional growth in the field of teaching. Last semester, we organized a series of events tailored to enrich the academic and professional experiences of future teachers. These included a Welcome Social with pizza to build community, an interactive Fall Bingo Night with an educational twist hosted by Education Club and KDP, a collaborative Palette and Pages Study Night designed to encourage critical thinking, and the engaging "Are You Smarter Than A Fifth Grader?" event in collaboration with the STEM club, which provided a fun way to examine core elementary education concepts. Additionally, we are offering targeted professional development workshops addressing current challenges and opportunities in the education sector.





# River Day

by Clare Griffin  
(BSEd. Early Childhood & Childhood Education)

Pictured: Kayla Perri (BSEd. Childhood); Kiara Ford (BS Educational Studies Studies); Michaela Fagan (BSEd. Early Childhood and Childhood Education)



## Student Voice

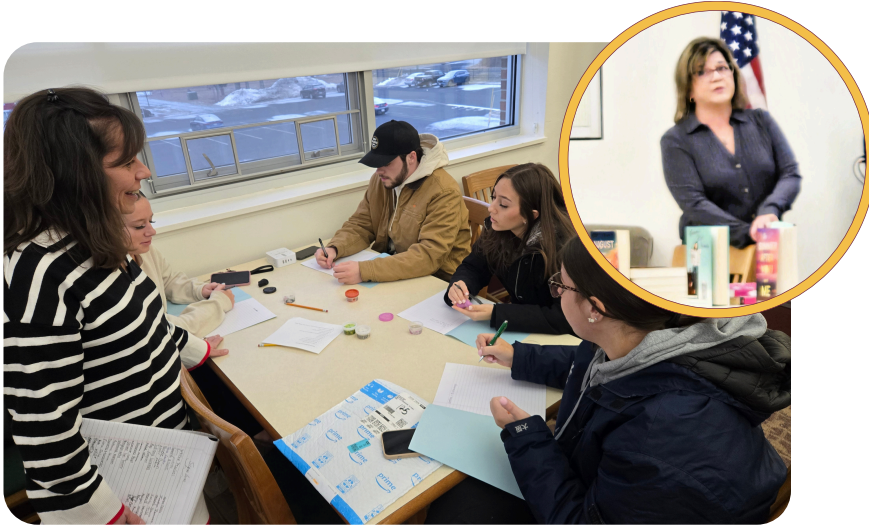
I participated in River Day, an event held on October 10, 2024, where 5th grade classes from the Nyack School District tested the Hudson River. Thousands of students have the opportunity to catch and release various fish species, track the river's tides and currents, check salinity levels, examine water chemistry and quality in this annual event, known as "Day in the Life of the Hudson and Harbor." This hands-on learning experience is coordinated by the Hudson River Estuary Program of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, in partnership with the Hudson River National Research Reserve and the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory.

During the first part of the day, I collaborated with two different schools. I had one fifth grade class from 9 am to 11 am and another class from 12 pm to 3 pm from each school. During River Day, I worked with students to test the water current, low tide or high tide, water temperature, air temperature, and clarity of the water. I found many children fascinated with the idea of brackish water. Brackish water is a mixture of freshwater and saltwater. When the freshwater from the Appalachian Mountains mixes with the saltwater of the ocean, the water in the estuary of the Hudson River is brackish.

During this group work time, I witnessed a variety of different learning approaches: experimental, collaborative, and direct which enabled students to learn in different ways. Participating in River Day was an incredible experience that provided a deep understanding of the Hudson River's ecosystem. It highlighted the complexities of the River's behavior and sparked curiosity among the students. This event not only enhanced our understanding but also fostered a greater appreciation for the Hudson River and its environment.



# Commitment to Life Long Learning



In a workshop on "The Art of Writing," author Jen Doktorski, Dr. Collucci's sister, shared her own experience in creative writing with 35 School of Education students. The workshop helped students see themselves as writers as well as teachers of writing. The hour and half workshop included a look at the author's own drafting and brainstorming materials as well as an opportunity to practice some pre-writing and revising strategies that the preservice teachers can use with their future students.

On November 19th, 25 elementary and secondary teacher candidates participated in a professional development workshop on teaching environmental and global studies. The workshop was facilitated by Population Education. The non-profit organization provides educators with innovative, hands-on lesson plans and classroom strategies focused on human population growth and its impact on the environment and human well-being.



STAC

chats



In October, Ashlee Butler, the Family Community and Engagement Supervisor at Haverstraw Head Start, came to talk to students from the School of Education about the work she and the other staff at Head Start do for young children and their families. During the session, which Dr. Elizabeth Finnegan moderated, Ashlee described how she became a social worker and decided to stay with Head Start because she likes interacting with the families and staff. Ashlee spoke on a more challenging aspect of her job. As part of her duties, she has to determine whether families are eligible for the Head Start program based on their income, and even when families earn just a few dollars over the federal eligibility guidelines, she has to turn them away. Ashlee told the students her job is extremely rewarding because she sees families who might have faced food insecurity or homelessness flourish and start to support each other.



# FACULTY UPDATES

Dr. Lo and Michael Malin presented a poster titled "ChatGPT's Disruption of Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction: How the Predictive Nature of an LLM Contributes to Stereotyping in Student Research" at the National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention in Boston, MA on November 23, 2024. Michael, an English teacher at North Rockland School District, is an alum of BS Educational Studies and MST program.

Last semester, Dr. Nydia Prishker led a series of professional development workshops for home-based childcare providers at Grail Family Services in San Jose, California. She focused on teaching early mathematical concepts and she provided practical tips on how to effectively promote mathematical learning in young children.

Dr. Finnegan co-authored an article titled "How teachers provide writing instruction to autistic students" published in *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*. She will present at the Council for Exceptional Children Annual Convention in Baltimore this March on designing writing instruction for students with autism.

Dr. Collucci presented at the Association for Literacy Educators and Researchers on November 8th, 2023 in Orlando, Florida. Her presentation was titled, *Going for Gold in Literacy: Teaching Foundational Skills within an Engaging Learning Environment*

Dr. Ciotoli's paper titled "Using Instructional Rounds to Build a Community of Inclusive Practitioners – Year 3," was accepted for the 2025 AERA Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado. She continues to work with All In for Inclusive Education.

A month prior to successfully defending her doctoral dissertation in June 2024, Dr. Rosati presented at the Northeast PBIS Network Leadership Forum, Mystic, CT. She co-presented on "PBIS Skills Beyond High School: A Special Education Youth Perspective on Transition," and "College & Career Readiness: Who Are We Failing, and How Can We Improve? "



## Rockland Read-In

Nicole Gysin (MST Math 7-12 & Students With Disabilities) and Skylar Freitas (BSEd. Childhood Education) read to students at Spring Valley High School in East Ramapo Central School District as part of the Annual Rockland Read in.

