Meet Our Early Education Specialists

Karen Dispenziere
Visual Arts

Dr. Katheryn Kennedy
Science & Design

WORKING WITH OUR EDUCATION SPECIALISTS GIVES PECK STUDENTS A DISTINCT ADVANTAGE OVER THEIR PEERS AT OTHER SCHOOLS. Starting in kindergarten, your child regularly leaves her home classroom to study, explore, and play with highly trained subject-matter experts. From Spanish to science and design, to the arts and sports, to library skills to woodworking, your child expands her thinking, creativity, and confidence during her earliest years, when she’s most open to learning.

We invite you to meet our education specialists—and they look forward to meeting you.

By providing children with diverse artistic experiences, Ms. Dispenziere cultivates their curiosity and capability to ask how and why. In every class, she creates a supportive, joyful environment where children explore and even initiate their own learning. She holds a BS in Art Education from the University of Delaware, and has taught visual arts at Peck for more than 20 years.

I love helping students find books that make them want to read more! I’m thrilled when children recommend books they’ve enjoyed to others, and especially when they return a book to me and say, “I loved this one. What should I read next?”

Research shows that the earlier children are exposed to books, the more likely they’ll become lifelong readers. That’s why Ms. MacVicar carefully chooses materials to reinforce classroom activities, to help children discover a wide variety of authors and illustrators, and to engage emergent readers with the written word. At Peck for nearly 20 years, Ms. MacVicar holds a BA in History from Susquehanna University and an MS in Library Science from The Catholic University of America.

The world needs more and more compassionate creativity to solve the difficult problems we face. In making art, children learn to observe—not just see—and truly understand the world around us.

I hope my students develop self-confidence in scientific exploration, as well as a shared sense of community and society at large. By nurturing their natural curiosities about the world, children learn how to keep questioning, discovering, and contributing throughout their lives.

In Dr. Kennedy’s classes, budding scientists actively explore scientific concepts, share their ideas while working successfully together, and—perhaps most important—discover that it’s OK to struggle when trying to solve a scientific (or any) problem: you try again and don’t quit. Dr. Kennedy holds a BS in Biology from Siena College, an MS in Biomedical Sciences from Baylor University, and a PhD in Education from Walden University.

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Physical Education & Sports

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We strive to produce athletes with exemplary character. We hope that all of our students are comfortable with their capabilities, feel valued, persevere, take ownership, and are responsible and trustworthy.

Our Physical Education & Sports faculty know that athletics is an essential method for building character—resilience, confidence, and teamwork—alongside physical skills. Ms. Caruso holds a BS degree from The College of New Jersey in Health and Physical Education, and a BS from William Paterson University in Exercise Science and Athletic Training. Mr. Spadafora holds a BS in Natural Science from Juniata College, where he played four years of college baseball. He also coached college baseball and ran the baseball division of a youth sports company before coming to Peck. Ms. Sweeney holds a BS from Kent State University and is in the university’s Hall of Fame for field hockey. She has taught at Peck for nearly 30 years.

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Woodworking

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It is a pleasure to witness the satisfaction children derive from working with their hands and stretching their imaginations.

Mark Mortensen
Woodworking
Music
Lisa Wichman
Lower School Psychologist

I love seeing my students’ eyes light up when I tell them that we are going to “visit” (visit) a new Spanish-speaking country and its culture. It’s such a joy to hear my students speak Spanish and see that a-ha moment when they understand a new Spanish expression or vocabulary word.

Adriana Sykora
Modern Language (Spanish)

Señora Sykora’s approach to second language acquisition is to provide students with an immersive language experience. When students graduate from her classes, they possess not only strong conversational and expressive skills, but also the curiosity and ability to constantly discover more about the world. Señora Sykora has earned her BA in business, and a master’s degree from a dual program in Germany and Venezuela.

It’s incredibly rewarding to help children learn how to push themselves in healthy ways and meet challenges with confidence, which ultimately strengthens their own sense of potential. They begin achieving more than they ever thought possible.

Ms. Tabor believes that all students have unique academic, social and emotional skills that can be encouraged and fostered to create well-rounded learners. By helping students understand their strengths and challenges, Ms. Tabor helps them to face obstacles with confidence and develop strong problem solving skills. She has been a practicing, certified School Psychologist for seven years in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, with a BA in Psychology and History from Muhlenberg College and an MA in School Psychology from Marist College.

Everyone has an innate ability to make and respond to music. It’s the world’s universal language. And there’s nothing I love more than making music with young children as they grow up.

Ms. Wichman believes children blossom when we give them opportunities to perform artistically—through song, movement, playing musical instruments, and more. She seeks to inspire teamwork through group performances, and ensure that children build foundational skills in reading, writing and playing music. Ms. Wichman holds a BM in Music Education from Westminster University and advanced certifications from Westminster Choir College. A music educator for more than 30 years, she shares her passion for music education by presenting workshops for music teachers and serving as the NJSMA Elementary Music Division Chairperson.

TO LEARN MORE Call our Admissions Office at 973-539-8660 ext. 108 to schedule a parent visit and tour to meet our early education specialists in person.

An affinity for reading is a powerful mindset for children as they grow into independent, critical thinkers. We use a balanced literacy and multi-sensory approach to reach all types of learners in a fun, interactive environment—and proven techniques to foster the personal growth and analytical skills students need to reach benchmarks in any learning environment.

Our successful Guided Reading approach ensures that each child comfortably builds an affinity for reading at his or her own pace, within a small group of peers who share similar learning stages and styles. Groups remain fluid as developmental needs ebb and flow, so that children may be appropriately challenged and supported at every stage. Ms. Finnegan holds a bachelor’s degree from Marist College and a master’s from Southern Methodist University. Ms. Vallario, director of the department, holds a bachelor’s degree from Stony Brook University, a master’s in education from the College of Staten Island, and a reading certification from New York University.

My hope is every student sees him or herself as a mathematical thinker that can problem solve, persevere, explore, and think flexibly about different problems.

Ms. Hogan knows that not every student acquires math skills at the same pace. For this reason, she and our master homeroom teachers ensure students each progress at their own individual level through our Guided Math approach. Students focus on building number sense, explore the “why” in every problem, and use “math talk” to explain their thinking and defend their reasoning, all helping them think more deeply as mathematicians. Ms. Hogan holds bachelor’s degrees in Elementary Education and Math & Computer Science from Boston College, and a master’s degree in Urban Education from Simmons College.

It’s exciting to see kids find creative ways to display their knowledge using technology. And it’s inspiring to see teachers do the same when integrating technology into projects, infusing new life into the curriculum.

Ms. Garvey’s goals extend far beyond showing students what different technologies can do. She ensures students know how to choose the right tool to further their learning—because she wants them to be creative content producers, not just consumers. With a BA in Early Childhood Education from Boston College, and an MA in Educational Technology Leadership from George Washington University, Ms. Garvey has taught at Peck for more than 10 years.

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