

The Road Back: HCST Adapts to A New Way of Learning for 2020-21 School Year



After three months of distanced learning, the Hudson County Schools of Technology is excited to begin welcoming students and staff back into the classroom for a hybrid learning style of education. After reviewing the results of a district-wide survey that was conducted earlier this summer, HCST decided to offer in person learning opportunities for middle and high school students that meet the requirements of Governor Phil Murphy's reopening Executive Order.

Classes began at High Tech High School, County Prep High School and Explore Middle School on Wednesday, September 9th, with the first two weeks being done completely online. Beginning this week, a hybrid, learning model began where our high school students have the opportunity to attend class in person once a week and Explore Middle School students are meeting up to twice per week. Parents still have the option to keep their children home for a complete virtual learning experience.

"As we have begun another new learning experience for our students, please know that the HCST dedicated faculty, staff and I have been committed to a positive and productive start to this school year," said **Superintendent Amy Lin-Rodriguez**. "We recognize this is an unsettling time for all of us, but together, we have begun this journey within our new education environment stronger than ever before. I am grateful for the support our staff and county leadership have provided us during this time of transition and thank each of you for your continued patience, cooperation and understanding."

During the initial phase of hybrid learning, there will be no more than 25% of the student population in each building at a time and strict social distancing guidelines will remain in place. All students and staff will be required to wear a mask at all times, with the exception of lunch and outdoor physical activities. Teachers will provide a combination of live and previously recorded lessons to students and special education accommodations will be made for those who need it. High school students should be prepared to be in their virtual classrooms between 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and middle school students between 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

A full list of bus stops is available online and vehicles will undergo heavy clearing multiple times a day. Food services will also continue for students attending hybrid learning sessions and meals for those attending virtual classes can be picked up from their respective schools.

For up to date information about the district's reopening plan, please visit www.hcstonline.org/covid-19-information.

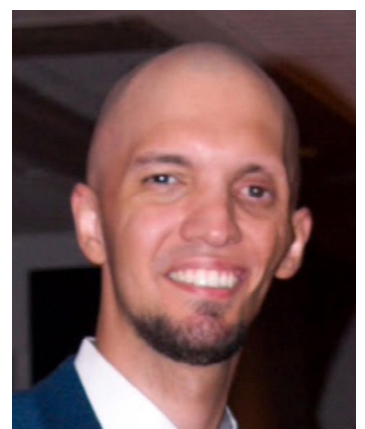
Welcoming HCST's Newest Faculty Members

This September, the Hudson County Schools of Technology is welcoming several new staff members. We'd like to take a moment to welcome some of the newest (and even some returning) faces to our district.



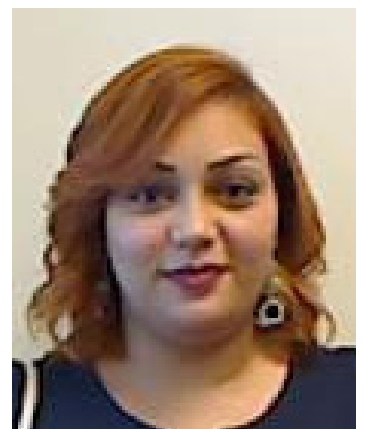
Ana Landron is joining High Tech High School as a Spanish instructor. Teaching has always been a vocation for her and she opened her own language institute in the Dominican Republic early on in her career. Landron is excited to join the HCST community because she believes vocational schools are the future of education and that every student should have the opportunity to create their own future based on their passions and interests. She received her Liberal Arts-Romance Languages with a Spanish Major from Hunter College and a Master's Degree in E.C.E. and SpEd. from Touro College.

Orlando O'Neill is returning to County Prep High School, his alma mater, to work in the Social Studies and Special Education Departments. It was during his four years of high school where he discovered his love for history and learned he had a passion for teaching. While a student, he was diagnosed with cancer at 16 and after the overwhelming support he received from the district, he knew he one day wanted to return as an educator. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in History and Secondary Education Master's Degree in Special Education for New Jersey City University and was mentored by Superintendent Amy Lin-Rodriguez during his studies.



Adriana Medina is joining High Tech High School as a guidance counselor in the Culinary Science Academy. She has always had an interest in working with students to help them achieve their goals and guide them through life's obstacles. Since learning about HCST and its mission, she knew this was a community she wanted to be part of. This year, she's looking forward to getting to know her students and helping them create a memorable high school experience.

Dina Mohamed is joining High Tech High School as a Mathematics instructor. She first discovered her love for teaching after working as a substitute in Paterson, where she learned how important it was for students to have a teacher to relate to them. She was drawn to HCST because of the district's philosophy of using students' interests to help further their education and careers. She's looking forward to meeting her new students and helping them achieve their goals.



Diana Fiore is returning to HCST as a Spanish instructor for levels I and II. She previously worked in the district as her first job out of college and is excited to once again work alongside the staff and administration who supported her during the earliest years of her career. One of the things she loves most about HCST is the diversity of the community and is looking forward to not only teaching the Spanish language to students, but also the culture and social themes of Spanish speaking countries. She hopes to demonstrate the importance of social responsibility to her students and bring awareness to global issues because they will be the leaders of the future.

Jessica D'Onofrio joins County Prep High School as an English and Special Education Instructor and is returning to HCST after graduating from CPHS in 2015, when she was named Class Comedian. It was during her junior year of high school when she decided she wanted to be a teacher and follow in the footsteps of her favorite educators. She's excited to be back "home" and is looking forward to seeing how learning can be pushed, pulled and stretched in all different directions.



Continuing Professional Development Programs During COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hudson County Schools of Technology has been working diligently to ensure professional development programs go uninterrupted to best serve students and staff. Many of these individuals often work behind the scenes and we would like to introduce a few of them to you.



Kristen Bilyj

Kristen is a Human Resources Generalist who is responsible for reviewing certifications, district evaluations and ensuring professional development opportunities are offered and met. As HCST has adapted to different techniques of educating during the virus, she has played an integral role in ensuring our staff remains healthy and safe in the classroom. Over the past year, she has worked with the Human Resources Department to realign the professional development plans with all schools to bring the entire district closer together to achieve common goals.



Carrie Rapaport

Carrie currently serves as the Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction. The department has been responsible for the creation of a Professional Development and Best Practices Committee, which has offered additional platform for staff to share ideas and resources. She is also responsible for the direct oversight of HCST's new position of educational coaches in collaboration with the high school principals. During the pandemic, she has worked with a team to ensure the entire district has had everything needed for teachers to adapt and learn from one another so students continue to receive the best education possible.



Mike Forenza

Mike works in the HCST Technology Department and is responsible for teaching students and staff how to use their district-issued devices. Since the beginning of the pandemic, he has been providing remote support to the entire district to help everyone become oriented and acquainted in a virtual learning environment. This summer, he has been working with small groups of teachers to ensure they are comfortable with remote teaching from their classrooms. He was part of the team who quickly began transitioning education to an online format to prevent any lapse in instruction.



Linda DiGiacomo

Linda works as the district's Supervisor for Basic Skills, serving as the Anti-Bullying Coordinator, Structured Learning Coordinator and helps manage the Pre-Apprenticeship in New Directions program. She is the Hudson County Social Emotional Learning Character Development Consortium. Throughout the pandemic, she has worked with staff to identify new behavioral issues that may arise during distance learning and how to properly address them. She has sought to provide the skills needed to the entire HCST community and their families to help them manage emotional stages each day during this difficult time so everyone continues to succeed.



Beatriz Amaro

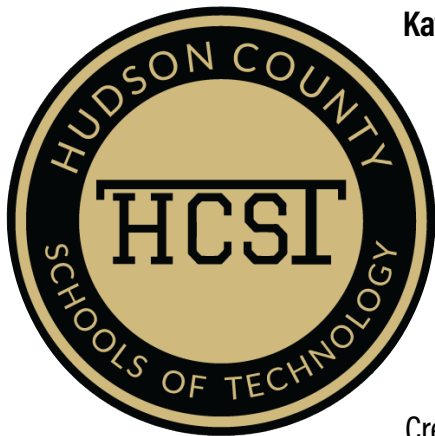
Beatriz is the Curriculum, Assessment and Policy Advisor at HCST. In her role, she has provided educational support services for all instructors to ensure students are able to reach their maximum potential during distance learning. Her department created a Professional Development and Best Practices Committee and appointed Educational Coaches to help teachers throughout the pandemic. They are currently working to identify any learning gaps that may arise, deliver the proper educational instructor level for each student and are in the process of building a professional development library to address staff's individual needs.

Staff Spotlight

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to adapt to new ways of educating our students, staff at the Hudson County Schools of Technology worked around the clock to ensure there was no lapse in instruction. Members of our Community have gone above and beyond their titles to see that remote learning was executed responsibly and that our students and staff remain safe and healthy when they return to the classroom. We'd like to highlight a few of those individuals here and thank them for keeping us **#HCSTstrong**.



Asunción Los Banos is the Data Management and Technology Resource Coordinator in the district's Technology Department. She is an alumnus of County Prep High School and has been working at HCST since graduating in 2004. During the pandemic, she was a member of HCST's Emergency Management Task Force and helped create a response plan for the district. She was responsible for coordinating communications to parents and is now helping each school track their hybrid/virtual Commitment to Learning Consent Form. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, Los Banos has found this to be a humbling and rewarding experience that has taught her the importance of finding happiness within oneself.



Kathy Young has just completed her first year as the Principal of High Tech High School/ACTE. While the past several months have brought unexpected challenges, she remained committed to helping her students work to the best of their ability and seeing that she and her staff gave extra time and energy to serve as mentors and counselors for students struggling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Young serves as the Director of the Bella Babies Childcare program at the Earl W. Byrd Center in Jersey City, a certified childcare center where high school vocational majors have the opportunity to earn their certificate for Child Development Associate Credential. She strives to encourage her students, and own children, to have faith, be safe and know this too shall pass. Young is incredibly proud of her students for persevering through this because it has proven what she has already known, that they are amazing and resilient young adults.



John Shinnick has worked at HCST for the past 12 years and currently serves as both the Assistant Business Administrator and the School Safety Specialist. Since the beginning of the pandemic, he has worked diligently with the district's entire administrative team to help coordinate reentry, emergency and management plans to ensure that students, faculty and staff remain safe and healthy, without interrupting instruction. While this job has been challenging, he's found the experience rewarding because by remaining positive and working together, HCST has been able to continue living out its mission to create diverse learning opportunities for all of its students.

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Joseph M. Muniz, *Board Secretary*
Nicholas Fargo, *Business Administrator*
John Shinnick, *Assistant Business Administrator*

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