

EDUCATION CONNECTION

Florida Atlantic College of Education

July/August 2026 Vol. 6 Issue 6



A BIMONTHLY eNEWSLETTER



COE Honorees Recognized at Honors Convocation

Florida Atlantic University President Adam Hasner, along with Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Ken Dawson-Scully, recognized two College of Education faculty members, one COE student and six Florida Atlantic University High School students during the 57th Annual Honors Convocation held on April 15, 2026, on the Boca campus:

University Scholar

Layann Abdallah, College of Education
Majoring in Mathematics Education
(one of eight university scholars)

Undergraduate Researchers of the Year (Dual Enrolled FAUHS students)

Isabelle Yi
Kezia Abraham
Mark Zagha
Shyla Grant

(four of eight college awardees)

Goldwater Scholarship

(Dual Enrolled FAUHS students)
Danylo Fedkiv
Kyle Loh

[Two FAU Students Honored as 2026 Goldwater Scholars](#)

Finalist for the Distinguished Mentor of the Year in Undergraduate Research

Maria Vásquez-Colina, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Educational Leadership and Research
Methodology
(one of five finalists)

Finalist for the Distinguished Teacher of the Year

Alex Fields, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Counselor Education
(one of nine finalists)

[FAU Hosts 57th Annual Honors Convocation](#)

TOP STORIES

COE HOLDS HONORS AND AWARDS CEREMONY

FAU College of Education recognizes its outstanding faculty and students.

LESSONS FROM FINLAND: GAPS IN SPECIAL ED MATH INSTRUCTION

Findings show that while about 90% of teachers feel prepared to teach most math topics, clear gaps remain,

FAU LAB SCHOOLS RECOGNIZED BY DISCOVERY EDUCATION

A.D. Henderson and FAU High School receives one of six "School of the Year" awards nationwide.

COE Holds Honors and Awards Ceremony

FAU College of Education recognized its faculty and students during the COE Honors and Awards Ceremony held on May 7, 2026, on the Boca Raton Campus.

Charles Dukes, Ed.D., Ph.D., COE Interim Dean, presented College awards, along with Michael DeDonno, Ph.D., Interim Assistant Dean of Research, respectively, and recognition:

Faculty Awards



Alex Fields, Ph.D.,
Assistant Professor
Counselor Education,
COE Distinguished Teacher of the Year

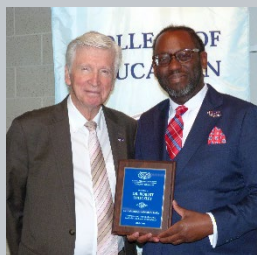
Charles Dukes, Ed.D., Ph.D. (right), COE Interim Chair



Maria Vásquez-Colina, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Educational Leadership and Research
Methodology
COE Distinguished Mentor of the Year

Michael DeDonno, Ph.D., (right), Interim Assistant Dean of Research

Special Acknowledgement



Robert Shockley, Ph.D.
Department Chair of Educational Leadership
and Research Methodology
2008-2026
Outstanding Leadership and Service

Charles Dukes, Ed.D., Ph.D. (right), COE Interim Chair

Lauren Robinson, Ph.D. (below, right), Principal, A.D. Henderson University School and FAU High School, presented two awards:

ADHUS/FAU High School



Ella Pillitteri (far left)
University School Instructor
FAU District Teacher of the Year
Valerie Rivera, MBA
Administrative Assistant
FAU District School Related Employee of the Year

[FAUS 2027 TOY and 2026 EOY](#)

DeDonno and Dukes (below, right) presented college-wide awards, respectively:

Student Awards



Rebecca Nelson, Ph.D. (not present)
Counselor Education
Dissertation Title: *Safe and Sound: A Polyvagal Intervention for Trauma and Therapeutic Engagement*
Outstanding Dissertation of the Year



Lily Doyle, Undergraduate
Academy for Community Inclusion
Dr. Rosanna Gatens Student Award for Outstanding Community Service



Maria Soto, Graduate
Curriculum and Instruction
Dr. Rosanna Gatens Student Award for Outstanding Community Service

Department Chairs presented awards to students in their departments:

Academic Excellence



Allison Dobuler
Communication Sciences and Disorders
Outstanding Graduate

Dale Williams, Ph.D.(right), CSD Chair



Devin Rohack
Counselor Education
Outstanding Graduate

Elizabeth Villares Sacks, Ph.D. (right), CE Chair



Payton Schiering
Curriculum and Instruction
Outstanding Undergraduate

Sabrina Sembiante, Ph.D. (right), CI Interim Co-Chair

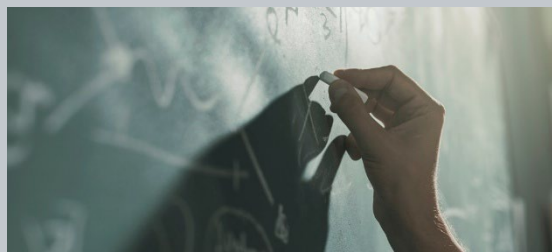
(continued on page 3)

Lessons From Finland: Gaps in Special Education Math Instruction

Students with special needs are often missing out on critical areas of math instruction — especially data processing, statistics and probability — raising concerns about their readiness for real-world problem-solving. A new study of Finland’s lower secondary schools takes a closer look at what special education teachers are actually teaching, how prepared they feel and how consistently they use proven instructional strategies.

Published in the [Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research](#), the findings reveal a nuanced picture. About 90% of teachers reported feeling prepared or very prepared to teach most areas of mathematics. However, data processing, statistics and probability stood out as a clear gap — both in terms of instruction and teacher confidence. This pattern closely mirrors trends in the United States, where these topics are also under-taught for students with special needs.

“Finland’s system shows the impact of highly educated, well-supported teachers, but it also reveals challenges that look very familiar in the U.S.,” said [Joseph Calvin Gagnon](#), Ph.D., sole author and chair and professor, Department of Special Education with [Florida Atlantic University’s College of Education](#). “The key takeaway is that preparation alone is not enough. We need to ensure teachers feel confident teaching all areas of math, especially data-related concepts, and that they consistently use evidence-based practices that we know help students succeed.” [Finland: Gaps in Special Education Math Instruction](#)



COE Honors & Awards

(continued from page 2)



Nerline Saint-Velus
Curriculum and Instruction
Outstanding Graduate

Sabrina Sembiante, Ph.D. (right), CI Interim Co-Chair



Kelli Listermann
Educational Leadership and Research
Methodology
Outstanding Graduate

Robert Shockley, Ph.D. (right), ELRM Chair



Kiara Jones (not present)
Special Education
Outstanding Undergraduate



Jacqueline Mullen
Special Education
Outstanding Graduate

Joseph C. Gagnon, Ph.D. (right), SE Chair

Dukes recognized retiring faculty; Sita Ramnarace, Assistant Director, OASS, acknowledged donors and scholarship recipients.

Fond Farewells



Joyce Krzemienski, Ph.D. (left), Clinical Instructor, Educational Leadership and Research Methodology, retired effective June 30, 2026. She served the COE for more than seven years.

FAU Ushers Modernized Degree Management System for Undergrads

A new academic planning and management system, called “Stellic,” will be available to undergraduate students beginning Sept. 8, 2026 for summer and fall 2026 First-time in College (FTIC) students thanks to collaboration between the Office of Information Technology, the University Registrar and Advising Services. Incoming transfer and continuing students will gain access as the system is rolled out through July 2027. This platform modernizes how advisors and students plan out their academic journey by showing real-time requirements, accomplishments and pathways toward graduation. The main benefit for undergraduates will be the ability to monitor their academic progress, explore degree pathways and make informed decisions about their coursework. For academic and faculty advisors, this platform will provide a clear and consistent picture of how best to support them.

FAU Lab Schools

A.D. Henderson University School and Florida Atlantic University High School

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FAU Lab Schools Recognized by Discovery Education

[A.D. Henderson University School](#) and [Florida Atlantic University High School](#) – together known as FAU Lab Schools – are among just six schools nationwide to be selected as “School of the Year” as part of the 2026 Discovery Education Awards.

The FAU Lab Schools were honored for its vertically aligned, inquiry-based STEM instruction, as well as its nationally recognized research and applied learning model. As a public K-12 laboratory school district, the schools integrate rigorous academics with authentic research experiences, hands-on laboratory learning and interdisciplinary instruction beginning in the earliest grades.

“Being named Discovery Education School of the Year is a powerful affirmation of the exceptional work taking place throughout Florida Atlantic University Laboratory Schools,” said Joel Herbst, Ed.D., vice president for PK-12 pre-baccalaureate programs and FAU Lab Schools superintendent. “Our students benefit from a world-class faculty and staff who create a learning environment grounded in applied learning through innovation, curiosity and discovery, all driven by experiential learning and woven into the fabric of Florida Atlantic University, a top 100 R1 university. This recognition reflects the deep commitment of our faculty and staff, who have developed a model that prepares students not only for academic success, but to think critically and contribute meaningfully to our community, state and nation.”

[FAU Lab Schools Recognized by Discovery Education](#)

RESEARCH

[FAU Lab Schools Research Newsletters](#)

[The Center for Educational Strategy and Innovation Workshop Blog](#)

[Fifth Annual MPFI-FAU High School Capstone Celebrates Research Scholars](#)

The research of 18 [Florida Atlantic University High School—Jupiter Campus](#) students was recognized at the Senior Research Symposium on April 21, 2026 at the [Max Planck Florida Institute for Neuroscience](#).

[FAU Lab School Mate Club Students Win Big at Regionals](#)

On April 18, 2026, the A.D. Henderson University School and FAU High School MATE Club traveled to Tampa to compete in the MATE ROV Florida Regional Competition at the University of South Florida.

COE Staff Spotlights

Two members of the [College of Education](#) Dean's Office staff earned doctoral degrees on May 16, 2026: Traci Catto, Ed.D., Executive Director of School Engagement, Assessment and Accreditation, and Kelli Moransais, Ed.D., Director of School Engagement in the Office for School Engagement. They each earned an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership with Educational Leadership K-12 Specialization from Lynn University in Boca Raton, Fla.

Drawing from their experience working with College of Education undergraduate and graduate students in the [Accelerated Induction into Teaching \(AIT\)](#) program, they partnered up for their dissertation titled: *From Assessment to Action: Evaluating Support Components in Accelerated Induction to Teaching Programs for Enhanced Candidate Satisfaction and Program Improvement*.



The study began when Catto (left) and Moransais took over the AIT program and found that it had remained largely unchanged since the grant that originally funded it had ended. They wanted to know what components were working, what were not, and what could be improved — but to make those decisions, they needed real data, not guesswork. The timing also mattered: with the State of Florida actively encouraging alternative pathways into teaching, growing the AIT program had become a priority, and that growth needed to be built on solid evidence.

The study showed that strengthening the coaching model and mentoring structure, as well as expanding paid clinical experiences earlier in their program, would be the best way to grow the AIT. "Paid clinical experiences give candidates the chance to be in classrooms earlier, with coaching and mentoring support before they even reach student teaching," explained Moransais. "That early access means we can track their progress, observe their teaching, and give them actionable feedback while there's still time for it to make a difference."

"This allows us to make data-driven decisions," noted Catto. "The expectations of the State of Florida are changing rapidly. As a College of Education in Florida, we need to think creatively to be a leader in teacher preparation by finding innovative ways to create teacher leaders. We want to develop the best teacher candidates in the State."

A dedicated member of the COE for 30 years, Catto joined the COE Dean's Office as Director of School Engagement, Office for School Engagement in 2022, and was promoted to her present position in 2025. Previously, she served as Director of Clinical Placements in the Office for Academic and Student Services (OASS). Prior to transferring to OASS in 2004, she was a teacher and then Assistant Director of the former Karen A. Slattery Educational Research Center for Child Development.

In her current role, Catto oversees the Office for School Engagement and the Office of Accreditation, Assessment and Analytics. The former serves to engage meaningfully, intentionally and with documented impact of teacher candidates in local schools and community partners and the latter to facilitate ongoing programmatic, university and state accreditations and program approvals, assessment and data analytics for programs across the College.

Moransais joined COE Dean's Office in 2022 as Coordinator of School Engagement, Office for School Engagement, and was promoted to her current position as Director of School Engagement in 2026. Previously, Moransais taught at A.D. Henderson University School (ADHUS). She joined ADHUS as a University School Instructor in 2016 and was promoted to University School Accomplished Instructor in August 2020. Moransais received the Florida School District #72 Teacher of the Year award in 2022.

Through the Florida Teacher Lead Network, Moransais was trained by the New Teacher Center (NTC) in coaching and mentoring, which helped her transition to her current position where she facilitates and supports partnerships with schools and community agencies, as well as enhances faculty and student training to engage more efficiently and effectively in clinical experiences and student teaching.

Asked if she has any advice for COE students in teacher preparation programs, Moransais said, "The earlier candidates get into classrooms, the more experience and expertise they build over time."

FACULTY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Florida Atlantic College of Education

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Awards

Contreras-García, N. (2026). *Richard M. Romano Dissertation of the Year Award*. Council for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC).

Sperry, J.* (2026). *Don Dinkmeyer Social Interest Award*. American Counseling Association Conference & Expo.

*CE Alumnus and former adjunct instructor

Publications

Peer-Reviewed Articles

Miller, B. J., Finnegan, L., Cruz, E., Adams, K., & Randolph, K. M. (2026). Teaching financial literacy skills to college students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Journal of Special Education Technology, 0*(0), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01626434261441844>

Sodha, V. & Vásquez-Colina, M. (2026). Learning about Gujarati: Cultural identity and family language. *Florida Atlantic University Undergraduate Research Journal (FAURJ) 15*, 21-39. <https://www.fau.edu/our/ug-research-journal/faurj-vol-15-sp-26-digital.pdf>

Vásquez-Colina, M. D., Pappas, D., & Barakat, M. (2026). A mixed methods study of Hispanic parents' educational experiences during times of crisis. *Journal of Latinos and Education, 1*-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2026.2675533>

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IMPORTANT DATES

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION STUDENTS

August 11—COE Commencement Ceremony

COMPETITIONS

August 11 - October 6—
Application portal open for [Florida Atlantic Wave Competition](#)

SUMMER DEADLINES

July 13—Dissertation due to the [University Graduate Dean](#)

July 20—Thesis due to the [University Graduate Dean](#)

Publications

(Continued from page 6)

Conference Paper

Powers, J., Brown, S., Musgrove, A., O'Sullivan, J., Wuest, L., Brown, D., Bogle, R. & Lopez, S. (2026). Coding the Circulatory System: Integrating Art and Robotics to Foster Fifth-Grade STEAM Outcomes. In *Proceedings of Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference*.
<https://www.learntechlib.org/primary/p/2129186/>

Presentations

Keynote

Bloom, J. L. (2026, April 13). "The Power of Questions." 1-hour keynote address presented at the United Kingdom Advising and Tutoring Conference, Manchester, England.

Named Lecture

Bloom, J. L. (2026, April 3). "Appreciative Advising." 1-hour Chester E. Peters Lecture address, College of Education, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kan.

Invited Expert Panel

Gagnon, J.C., (2026). Invited Member of Expert Panel, *Assessment and Accountability*, Juvenile Justice Education Policy and Research Symposium, Bellwether. Harvard University, Boston, Mass.

Webinar

Scott, J.* (2026) *Serving Neurodivergent Populations During 988 Crisis Calls*. 2-hour Webinar for 988 operators on preventing suicides for individuals with autism. Florida Department of Children and Families, United States.

*Invited to further develop this webinar into a course on the Florida Behavioral Health Association's Learning Management System for ongoing use by the Florida Department of Children and Families.

Register for Information on Graduate Degrees

The Graduate College is holding virtual [information sessions](#) on [July 16, 2026](#) and [August 13, 2026](#) from 5 p.m. – 6 p.m. This hour-long session will include information regarding financial aid, testing and test preparation and graduate admission. Application deadlines and admission requirements may be searched by program, degree or college at [Graduate College Graduate Programs](#).

Students seeking information on specific master's, specialist or doctoral degree programs in the College of Education may contact the appropriate advisor listed at [COE Graduate Advisors and Contacts](#) for the following departments:

- [Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders](#)
- [Department of Counselor Education](#)
- [Department of Curriculum and Instruction](#)
- [Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology](#)
- [Department of Special Education](#)

For graduate advising and admissions, contact Jessica Stupeck, Assistant Director, Office for Academic and Student Services, at jstupec@fau.edu.

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