



CHARACTER MATTERS

LEADERS
IN
OUR
NEIGHBORHOOD
CHARTER SCHOOL

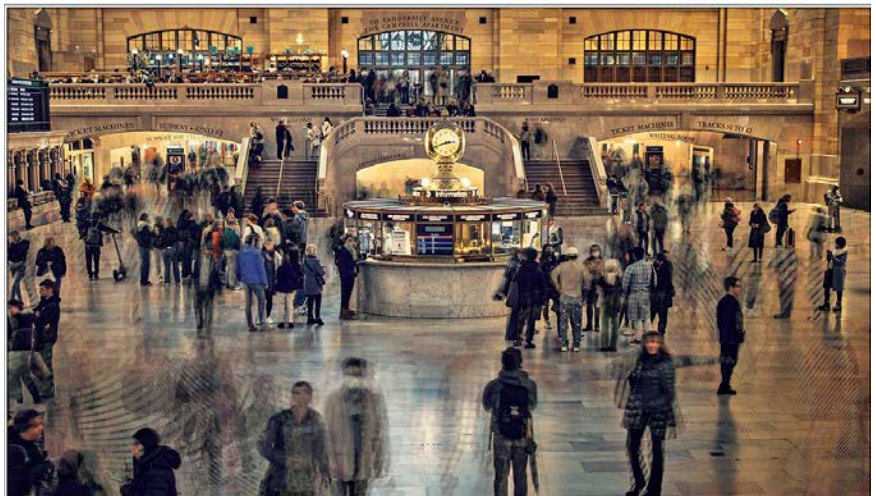
Creating a Home for Our Families



In recognition of the extraordinary leadership of LION’s founding Board Chair, Herb Fixler, we are excited to announce the creation of the new Herb Fixler Family Engagement Center and the development of the Herb Fixler Scholarship. This space seeks to recognize and amplify how character education and family engagement positively affect a student’s success. Herb has seen that impact firsthand, and it continues to drive his commitment to and leadership at LION. He affirms that LION’s Family Engagement Program “is a core element of LION’s school culture” that “can and has changed the lives of those who have experienced it.”

The decision to create this space within our building at 830 Hunts Point Avenue is purposeful. The high school building is a testament to Herb’s tireless work to bring educational vitality to the significantly underresourced and historically underserved Hunts Point community. When 830 Hunts Point Avenue was constructed under Herb’s stewardship in 2011, it was the first new high school to be built in the neighborhood in 30 years. To this day, it serves as a beacon in the community...

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Message from Our Executive Director

Reflecting on our inaugural year as Leaders In Our Neighborhood (LION) Charter School, we are so proud of all our students and staff have accomplished. Our staff have collaborated across and within divisions to align their work with students, and the progress is evident. Our students have shown tremendous academic growth and continue to evolve as young leaders in our community. They have showcased their curiosity in the classroom as well as through the pursuit of their potential in athletics, the arts, and the myriad enrichment opportunities available both at LION and the organizations with whom we partner. Likewise, our students have demonstrated their commitment to social justice both inside our school and in the community, distributing books and reading to our elementary students, partnering with the 41st precinct to provide new toys for children in the neighborhood, and engaging in critical conversations with community leaders. We have provided opportunities for our students to expand their horizons, from third grade students seeing "The Lion King" on Broadway to 20 middle school students traveling abroad for our first World Scholars Program international experience to our Class of 2024 students engaging in overnight college visits that changed their view of the college process. Lastly, we celebrated key transition points in our students' lives, which you will see highlighted in this issue.

As we embark upon our second year as LION, we are excited for the rich possibilities of what is to come in the 2023-2024 school year. In this issue, you will read about the new Herb Fixler Family Engagement Center we are creating to provide a home and resource center for our families within our high school building. Thank you, Herb, for your commitment to our school and your belief in the transformative power of our family program. You will meet our Division Directors and members of our staff, learn about our summer program, and hear the story of our alumna, Sara Luna. Every individual's story is unique and important to the summative impact of our school community.

We invite you to come visit us, meet our staff and students, and see the amazing work we do each and every day. We appreciate all our supporters who help make this work possible and allow us to continue to expand and evolve our program. Thank you for your belief in our school mission and the potential of our students.

Sincerely,

Celia Sosa
Executive Director

Reflections as LION's Founding Board Chair by Herb Fixler

Eighteen years ago, I was asked to serve as the Board Chair of a charter school planned for an undetermined location in New York City. At the time, I knew of charter schools primarily through the media coverage of the controversy in educational and political circles surrounding charter schools. Having agreed to serve, I embarked on one of the greatest learning experiences of my life. Looking back, I realize that serving as your Board Chair has also been one of my life's most meaningful, significant, and rewarding undertakings.

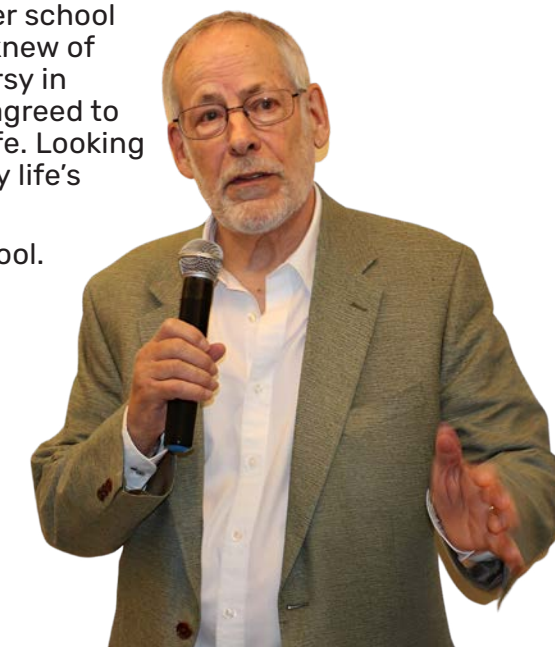
I am tremendously proud of Leaders In Our Neighborhood Charter School. I am proud of the students that have filled the halls of our schools, the families that have supported those students, as well as the teachers, administrators, and staff members who have nurtured our students and family members.

It has been my honor and privilege to have participated in making our school what it is today. It has also been an honor for me to have served with all those individuals who have supported our school with their generosity, both financially and in service. Among them are the Trustees whom I have had the pleasure to work with in service to our school. They have been unsparing in their commitment to LION, and without them our school would not be the excellent institution it is today.

I am so pleased that LION has chosen to honor me by naming the Family Engagement Center after me. I believe that our Family Engagement Program is at the heart of what we do at LION and is one of the main characteristics that sets our school apart.

I look forward to continuing in service to LION by remaining on the Board of Trustees.

Thanks to all of you and those who preceded you for giving me the opportunity to help make a difference in the South Bronx.



Creating a Home for Our Families Continued



In creating the Herb Fixler Family Engagement center, we seek to create a space that invites families to spend more time at our school, working with our staff and their students. We recognize, as does Herb, that a critical component of a student's academic success lies in the ways in which the community around that student can work together for their best. In the words of our Executive Director Celia Sosa, "Families will have a place they can call home."

In addition to the new family center, we have developed a senior scholarship in Herb's honor. We are proud to award an annual one-time scholarship in the amount of \$5000 to a senior who demonstrates exceptional character growth both individually and with their family.

On June 13th, we honored Herb at LION's Family Engagement Fundraiser, which raised over \$50,000 for the Herb Fixler Family Engagement Center and the Herb Fixler Scholarship. During the event, guests heard from LION parent and staff member Marta Rodriguez, LION alumnus Isaiah Best (Class of 2019), Executive Director Celia Sosa, Board Chair Herb Fixler, and incoming Board Chair Tony Stoupas about the importance and impact of LION's family engagement program. Thank you to all our supporters who made LION's Family Engagement Fundraiser a success!

Kindergarten Stepping Up



"Future so bright we need shades!"

On Wednesday, June 21st, the mood was electric and joyous as our Kindergartners, sporting neon sunglasses and their fanciest outfits, marched into the LION's Den to the delight and pride of LION staff and family members for their Kindergarten Stepping Up Ceremony. LION Kindergarten teachers spoke about how proud they were of their students' educational and social-emotional growth in their first year and how excited they were to see the Kindergartners move on to 1st Grade. The audience was treated to performances from students, heart-warming videos of students sharing what they were looking forward to in 1st Grade, and a surprise video of 1st grade teachers welcoming students. We are so proud of our rising 1st graders. Congratulations to our LION cubs and families!

8th Grade Stepping Up



As they prepared to transition to high school, LION students in 8th grade completed their middle school experience on Thursday, June 22nd with a Stepping Up Ceremony to mark the occasion. This year, Papa Ndiaye opened the ceremony as the elected student speaker, recalling his first day at LION and reflecting on his class's journey together. Students were recognized for yearly academic and character awards and listened to words of wisdom from Valedictorian Darwin Chavarria and Middle School Director Ada Garcia. Darwin encouraged his class, "The experiences we have had only made us stronger, strong enough to endure another year of tears and laughter. We must hold onto this strength and use it in high school and beyond...I know we will all end up making everyone proud." We are excited to watch our young leaders grow as they make their way through high school!

3rd Grade Stepping Up



On Tuesday, June 20th, LION staff, family, and community members had the honor of witnessing our 3rd grade students make the triumphant trek across the stage to receive LION pins and take their first official steps as middle school students. Guests had the privilege of hearing from teachers and staff members as they spoke lovingly about the victories and challenges that our 3rd graders experienced throughout the year and offered advice to help them best navigate their middle school years. Students spoke of their aspirations for their future careers, including NBA players, doctors, dancers, and of course, teachers. Under the guidance of Mrs. Ramos-Morales, the LION Roarers choir sang a stirring rendition of "A Million Dreams" from The Greatest Showman soundtrack. Congratulations, students. We are overjoyed to watch you continue your journey as LION 4th graders!



High School Commencement



LION Commencement is a truly unique and special occasion during which students are the focus of the day. LION seniors engage in a reflective process throughout their senior year to prepare them for the transition to post-secondary opportunities. This process culminates in a senior reflection, during which students speak about their journey at LION, the growth they have experienced, and the future they envision for themselves. As part of LION Commencement, almost every student gives a short speech inspired by their senior reflection. These speeches are the culmination of up to 13 years of LION's character program and reflect both the range of experiences our students have engaged in and the leaders they have become. We cannot wait to see what is in store for the Class of 2023!



Scan here to donate to our Graduation Campaign!



Miatta Massaley Elementary School Director



Tell us about yourself.

I have been working with students in schools for over 13 years, which is what I love to do. I was born in Queens, NY and raised on Long Island. From there I went to college at Penn State and got my master's degree from Hunter College. After I graduated from Penn State, I moved into the city and ultimately settled in Harlem. I live there with my one year old son and his father. I also have a dog named Dinero who I love.

Why did you decide to get into education, and what was the path that you took to get here?

I went into education because I think that it is important that all children receive an excellent and inclusive educational experience, no matter who you are or where you come from. In order to get here, I first went to college at Penn State where I thought I wanted to be a lawyer. When I graduated, I joined Teach for America first while also being in graduate school for my master's degree in education. From there, I decided education is where I wanted to stay, and I have been here ever since.

Why did you choose LION?

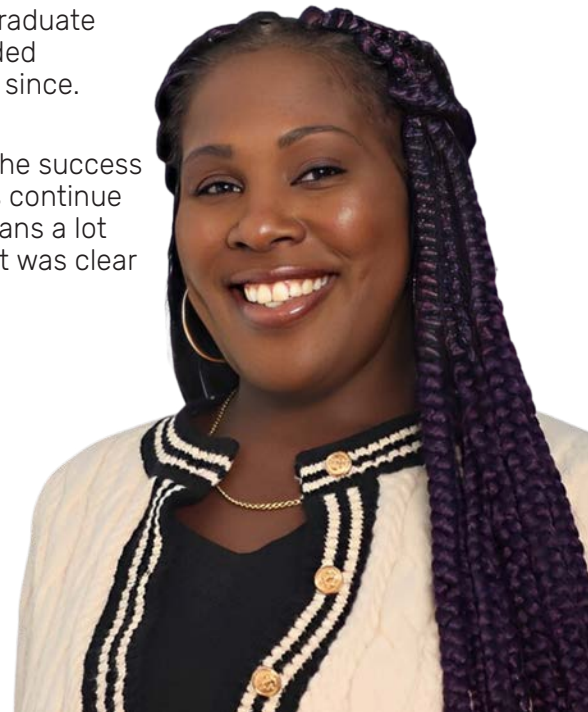
I chose LION because it was clear that LION invests heavily in the success of all people in the school community. It is a place that families continue to choose for their scholars, and staff choose to stay - that means a lot for the future success of students. I also chose LION because it was clear to me that when making decisions, the bottom line is always "what will best serve scholars."

Which pillar resonates with you most?

Social Justice. Social Justice is the reason I do this work. I believe that all scholars should have access to an excellent education and resources, no matter their zip code, and I have advocated for that for my entire career.

What advice would you give to students and families to have a successful 2023-2024?

Believe that you can achieve and never doubt your potential. Also, just know that we are always partners in this work, not just today, but always.



Ada Garcia Middle School Director



Tell us about yourself.

I am from the Dominican Republic but have been a Bronx native since the age of 2. I am the proud parent of a LION high school senior and am preparing to welcome another baby girl in November of this year. In my spare time I like to think of myself as an unofficial food critic and often times try to replicate recipes.

Why did you decide to get into education, and what was the path that you took to get here?

I always knew I wanted to work in education. Growing up, school was a window to other parts of the world for me, and oftentimes I buried myself in literature to escape things that were not as pleasant. I also questioned the variety of experiences I had in school and wanted to be a change agent in my community. At first, I wanted to go into social work, but after completing my undergraduate degree, I decided to try teaching with Teach for America (2014 corps member) and have remained at LION since.



Why did you choose LION, and what do you love most about the LION Community?

I chose LION because I saw myself in the students and families. It truly is a unique place that values the individual and what we each have to contribute to the community. It is a place that has seen me grow as a professional, a human being, and a parent.

What are you most proud of from this past school year?

I am extremely proud of everyone, truly. Returning to school after the pandemic has been an adjustment period for all, but there have been so many wins. We welcomed more students than ever in this year's National Elementary and National Junior Honor Societies' induction ceremonies. 94% of 8th graders passed their Algebra 1 regent exam on the first try, the Lacrosse team lost one game in the entire season, and so much more! There were so many moments of joy throughout the year, and I hope we can continue to spread the joy of learning across our community. I do have to emphasize that there was something magical about traveling to Paris, France with 20 students. It's a moment that will forever be remembered.

Which pillar resonates with you most?

The pillar that resonates most with me is Community. The Bronx is a special place and there are so many assumptions made, but we are so strong when it comes to community. I truly believe in the phrase "it takes a village..." and this can only be made possible by being rooted in our community.

Matt Hittenmark High School Director



Tell us about yourself

I was born and raised in Washington Heights, and I currently live in NJ with my wife Kristen and two sons, Derek and Luca.

Why did you decide to get into education, and what was the path that you took to get here?

My mother and older brother worked at a small independent school in Harlem where I also had the chance to volunteer each summer. I loved my experience and working with youth. After undergrad, I was looking for a career that would have an impact on my community and allow me to work with youth. Education soon became the obvious choice.

Why did you choose LION?

I started 17 years ago as a founding faculty member. I loved the idea of working with a community and building a school in collaboration with staff, family, and students. I love seeing the growth of our scholars from Kindergarten to middle school to high school and ultimately to their chosen college or career. My favorite moments are hearing alumni reflect on their journey and what led them to the health profession, NYPD, or construction fields.

Which pillar resonates with you most?

Community has always felt powerful to me, the sense that it truly takes a whole community to support our youth in their pursuits of post-secondary success. That includes our scholars, staff, families, community organizations, and local community allies.

What advice would you give to students and families to have a successful 2023-2024?

Ask questions and get involved.



Scan here to learn more about our school.



Summer Rising



Although the 2022-2023 school year may have ended, our students are always excited to learn and grow! This year LION was proud to offer our full-day Summer Rising program once again to students entering Grades 1-9 in the fall. The over 200 students enrolled were able to benefit from additional English Language Arts and mathematics learning opportunities to ensure they are prepared for the rigors of their upcoming grade. Students also engaged in enrichment courses, including art and dance, special events, and field trips, such as a Circle Line cruise around the Hudson River and a visit to local, Black-owned businesses, the Lit Bar and Playa Gelato. Elementary students ended their program with a block party for families featuring dance performances that students spent the summer working on with Performing Arts Teacher Danielle Nicolosi.

Over the course of the summer, staff worked tirelessly to ensure students had the best experience possible. They were most impressed by students' willingness to learn and their growth throughout the program. Elementary Summer School Director Lindsay Alexander shared, "I was excited to see the students' eagerness to attend the program each day and explore or review different math and reading tools. The new phonics program really helped students grasp concepts and grow as strong independent readers. It was also exciting to see the scholars participate in field trips that helped them learn about their community!" Students eagerness was evident through their daily attendance, which was over 90% for the course of the program.

For the second year in a row, LION is proud to be the recipient of a Bloomberg Philanthropies Summer Boost grant, which enabled us to offer a comprehensive summer program that engaged our students in critical learning opportunities and experiences. Thank you Bloomberg Philanthropies for making it possible to enhance and expand our summer programming!



"Being a Leader in a Male-Dominated Industry" An Interview with Sara Luna

Alumni Spotlight

Michael Morales: What is new and exciting for you right now?

Sara Luna: For me right now, the last thing I was working on is building housing that can not only house people but can bring people together. My partner and I worked on designing a housing complex in Rosario, Argentina that not only housed people but also helped artists to hone their skills. One of the big things we noticed from researching the site was the socio-economic impact that the building was able to make. There are flea markets in the area where people get necessities. So, not only do the residents now have a better residence, better quality housing, but the area itself has commercial space that can help elevate and provide for this community, such as how Hunts Point is growing as a residential and business community.

What were some of the highlights of your time as a student at LION?

The support! Leaving the school, you find that the support you still get post graduation is better than most of the support you will receive outside of school. Simply being able to apply those six LION pillars outside of the school is just as important as learning them inside of the school to be able to establish that leadership in yourself. You can't begin what you want to do unless you lead yourself to it. I was able to take that leadership quality with me into architecture because I was given tools and techniques. However, it's up to you to become great at architecture by building on those skills. I would say personally outside of school, especially in my career which is primarily male-dominated, you have to find that leadership in order to persevere in your career.



How did your experience at LION prepare you for college?

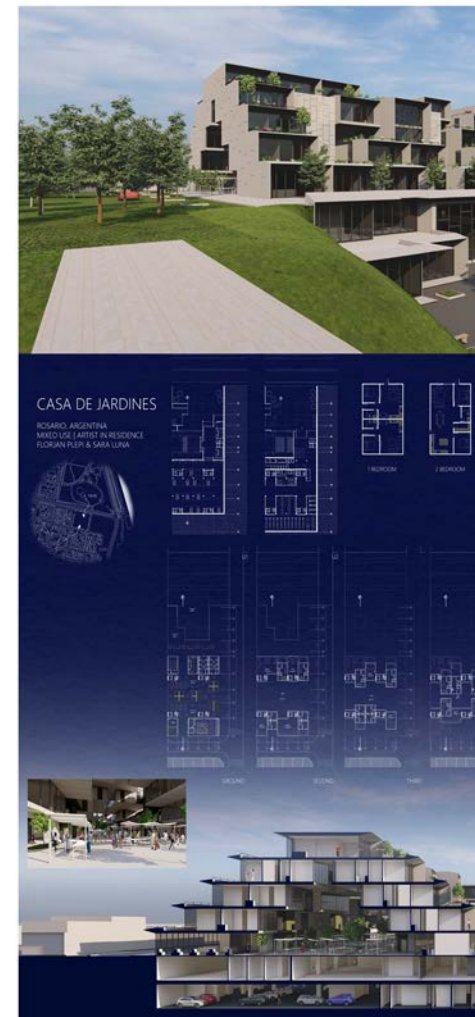
I feel like it was a thorough preparation for college. Once you get to college you speak to a lot of people from different parts of the city and schools, and it's not as thorough as it is here. A lot of the information that I left with here seems smacked upon you and suddenly is really useful because a lot of other students from other schools weren't given the same information or guidance that I received from LION.

How far are you from graduating? What are your plans post graduation?

I have a year left from the City College Architecture Program. After graduation, I'd like to start my own construction company. My dad has contracting experience and construction experience. So, hopefully I can find a way to get all the paperwork I would need done, start a business, and start my own construction company with the skills I've acquired throughout my career, being able to put my designs into play, and providing some kind of stability for my family.

What are three pieces of advice you would give students preparing for college?

Get what you need to get done, done. I feel like a lot of people procrastinate their senior year because it's more socially acceptable to slack off at this point in your high school career. Don't do it! I also had an issue procrastinating and could have had a more effective senior year if I had applied the same mindset that I had at the beginning of my high school career. As a student who did well, I didn't get things done how I wanted them to be done. Everyone has different scenarios that are affecting them, but it doesn't mean you won't succeed. I had to wait a year to enter the field I wanted, but now I'm almost done with the course. It won't always be a straight journey, but as long as you have the motivation, you'll make it there even if it's at a different time than others. So, definitely persevere, get things done, and keep that goal in mind. If it is a true goal and true passion of yours, that will keep you moving forward.





Janay Warner Elementary School



I am a first grade special education teacher and have worked at LION for four years. LION has supported my transition from teacher assistant to classroom teacher and continues to challenge me professionally. I've had a passion for teaching since I was in the fifth grade; working at LION has provided me the opportunity to live out my dream.

One of my ongoing goals in life is to grow. I understand that I do not have to be the best; I just have to be or do better than the last time. This mentality has always prepared me to do my best, and I hope it inspires my students and co-workers. In my personal life, I help to lead my family. I enjoy spending time with my two children and husband; we all enjoy doing activities such as ziplining, and rock climbing together.

I am most inspired by my students at work. They work hard, and it is apparent that they are eager to learn and want to be better readers. They inspire me to show up and provide them with the tools they need to reach their goal.

Imani Burroughs Middle School



I have been a middle school math teacher for three years. I gravitated to LION because of the mission and dedication to nurturing character in our students. LION has a very student centered/student driven approach in everything we do. Not only is LION a place that provides support for students and their families but the school also recognizes that the personal and the professional are interconnected for staff.

Working at LION has helped me develop a growth mindset. I've learned that feedback and reflection on my practice helps me become the best teacher for my students. I have also developed as a leader. I see myself as a leader who possesses self-awareness, reflects on every situation, and adjusts my actions accordingly. I focus on building relationships, and I lead with my heart and love for education and youth development. I am a leader in my personal life as a new mom. I am learning to use my strengths in order to deal with situations that require me to do so because one day I want my daughter to do so with ease. I am a very big person in practicing what you preach, and I never want my child to do as I say and not as I do. I am also a cheerleader for Cheer New York, a nonprofit organization of volunteer LGBTQIA+ and ally cheerleaders. Our mission is to use our athletic and philanthropic abilities to empower and affect change in our communities through charitable action.

The students and my colleagues inspire me daily. Each of our students come to school with their own stories and try to be their very best selves. I am so inspired when I see a student choose to do the right thing even when they don't realize we are watching. I am also motivated and inspired by my peers. I truly believe all staff members at LION love and are dedicated to helping our students grow academically, emotionally, and mentally. Not one person here makes this school go on their own; we are all a part of a system that creates an environment of love and support for our students.

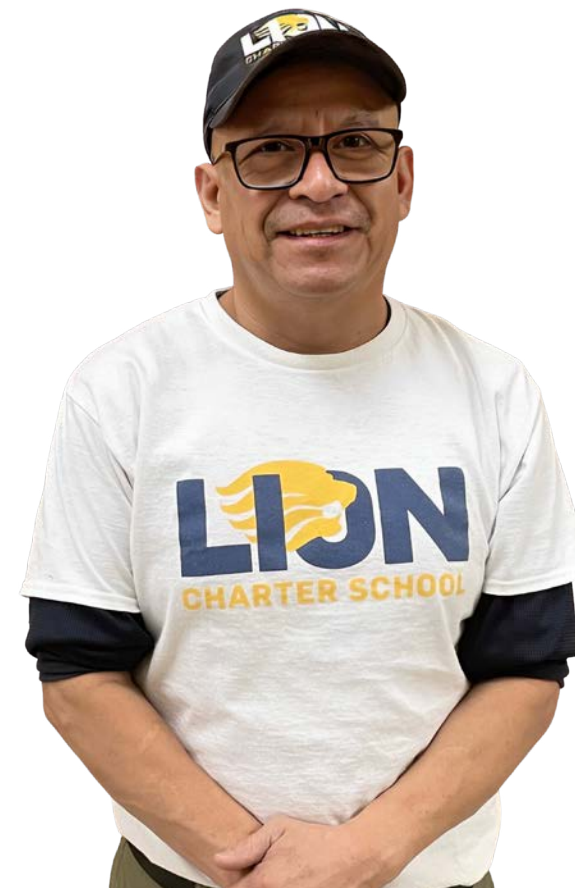
Manny Salazar High School



I joined LION Charter School to make a positive impact on the lives of students, staff and families. LION's core values and mission reflect my own passion for creating a supportive environment where we empower students to grow as visionary leaders. As an educator, I try to focus on nurturing well-rounded individuals through sports, arts, and community service.

I've kept active in the LION community by volunteering and using these opportunities to build meaningful connections with students and foster a sense of belonging. My role as assistant baseball coach has given me a unique opportunity to share my love of sports while instilling valuable life lessons like teamwork, discipline, and resilience. Recognizing students as individuals has been important to me. I have gained valuable insight into their backgrounds, interests, and learning styles by engaging in conversations, listening attentively, and showing genuine interest in their lives.

Working at LION has taught me the importance of being true to myself while also stepping out of my comfort zone. I've surrounded myself with mentors and I have used their guidance and wisdom to help navigate the challenges of teaching. I have continued to be inspired by my colleagues and students, who fuel my desire to grow as both an individual and an educator. Additionally, working at LION has allowed me to take part in building a thriving community of learning, where students and staff strive to be the best versions of themselves. Outside of work, I love to hike, DJ, and attend baseball games.



Antonio Villegas Operations



My job is to make sure everything in the school is clean, safe, and sanitized. I've worked in LION for 11 years. I decided to work at LION because I wanted to experience different types of jobs and was intrigued to work here.

Working at LION has helped me gain experience in learning new skills to communicate with all my coworkers and students. I see myself as a leader who is part of the school community, and I feel safe here. In my personal life, I am a leader because my self confidence comes from my ability to help people. My interest is to make sure the safety of my family is secure and my responsibilities of being a father.

I feel motivated and inspired to learn new things every day just from being in the environment of LION. The most important lesson I have learned here is that working on a team is essential to achieve the daily goals and responsibilities of the school.



Scan here for more news
about our staff and students.

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High School
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**DEVELOPING CHARACTER AND FOSTERING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
IN THE HUNTS POINT COMMUNITY**



LION LEADERS
IN
OUR
CHARTER SCHOOL NEIGHBORHOOD

Presents
Literacy & Libations
September 13th, 5-8 PM,
@Ryan's Daughter

