

CHARACTER MATTERS

LEADERS IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD



Middle School Director of Family Engagement Vida Guerrero at the Valentine's Day Pancake Breakfast.

Families Are the Heart of LION: Evolving Our Family Engagement Program

Families are the heart of LION. They are key partners, collaborators, and members of our school community. Our family engagement program distinguishes us and is an essential part of what our school offers. We aim to forge and strengthen partnerships through active engagement, support, mutual trust, and shared responsibility. We commit to building relationships, advocating for students and families, and responding to their evolving needs. There is power in community, and our collective commitment strengthens our LION community.

Family engagement programming has grown tremendously to address the needs of the parents and students of our community. Our Directors of Family Engagement hold a role unique to LION, directly supporting the 700+ families in our school and encouraging the importance of our family and community pillars. They ensure families receive the resources necessary to build positive relationships between staff, students, and families. They are also the bridge that connects families, students, and staff with opportunities to be a bigger part of the Hunts Point community.

In addition to fostering collaboration and communication, the Directors of Family Engagement play a crucial role in advocating for families and students. They work closely with school administrators and staff to ensure that policies and practices are inclusive and equitable. By being a voice for families, the Directors of Family Engagement help create a safe and supportive environment where all students can thrive. Elementary Director of Family Engagement Brezhnev Sanchez shared one example of family involvement in the school: "For the Hispanic/Latin Heritage Month showcase, families volunteered their time to help with the event and cooked the different cuisines from their respective countries. We hosted a feast that exposed students to the different foods and cultures of various Hispanic/Latin countries. Also, several family volunteers ran our book fair, which was a big help. It's all about creating more opportunities for families to be involved."

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Elementary School families set up a beautiful spread for Hispanic/Latin Heritage Month.

Middle School families enjoy their Valentine's Day Pancake Breakfast.

High School Director of Family Engagement Paola Bautista and participants at the Paint and Mocktails event in February.

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Message from Our Chief Executive Officer

Happy Spring! As we approach Spring Break, it is a pleasure to pause and reflect on the 2023-2024 school year thus far. I am heartened by the demonstrated commitment of our staff and the growth I have been privileged to witness in our students. Each day LION's Pillars are reflected in our program and practices. Students' curiosity is piqued in our classrooms. Our student-athletes demonstrate leadership on and off the field and court. We rely on the feedback and perspectives our families share with us and remain deeply rooted in the community we serve. I am so proud of all we have and will accomplish this year and in the years to come.

Our collective commitment to growth sets us apart as a school community, which calls on all members to draw on their talents and skills as well as engage in a consistent process of reflection and feedback. This issue highlights the contributions of myriad individuals and groups, including families, staff, students, and Board Trustees. We honor and remember the late Herb Kaplan, who served our community for 17 years, for his dedication to LION. His legacy lives on in our school, which he was so proud to champion. You will learn more about LION's Family Engagement Program, key components of our K-12 academic program, and what it means to be a student-athlete at LION. You will meet members of our K-12 staff and hear the story of Massaran Cisse, LION '19; University of Miami '23.

We invite you to visit us, meet our staff and students, and see our school in action. We appreciate your continued support of our mission and school community. Thank you for your commitment to the potential of our students.

Sincerely,

Celia Sosa
Chief Executive Officer

Remembering Herb Kaplan by Herb Fixler

I met Herb for the first time in the fall of 2000. I served as mentor/facilitator to the Hyde parent group, of which Herb and Leah were members. Little did I know then what we, and others, would accomplish in Hunts Point in the years ahead.

I remember Herb as intelligent, sincere, gentle, and open. At least in part, his Hyde experience made it possible for him to become the person we at Hyde-Bronx/LION who interacted with Herb had the good fortune to know.

Herb was a founding board member of our school. He served on the board from 2005, when we formed our charter organization, until his death last year. But before that, with Leah, he walked the streets of Hunts Point, seeking to attract families to the new charter school that would soon open on Bryant Avenue. He showed then the dedication he would bring to our school over the ensuing eighteen years.

As a board member, there was little that Herb was not involved with – fundraising, board expansion, governance, facilities – you name it. Herb was particularly effective as chair of the board Development Committee for many years. He initiated and led with great success the board's efforts to engage members of the Hunts Point business community in our school, and he helped launch LION's annual Graduation Campaign in 2013. He and Leah gave to our school generously. He was instrumental in identifying individuals as potential board members, some of whom joined the board.

I am proud to have served with Herb in advancing the interests of LION, its students and families, and the Hunts Point community. I can think of no person who exemplifies what our school stands for the way Herb did. His legacy will live on at LION, both in the hearts and minds of those fortunate enough to have known him and in the character of LION's students to whom Herb was so dedicated.



Herb Kaplan at the LION Spring Social 2023

The Importance of Being a Student-Athlete: Balancing Academics and Athletics

School sports play a significant role in the lives of many students. Engaging in sports not only helps students maintain a healthy and active lifestyle but also teaches valuable life skills. Our High School Director of Athletics, Jermaine Morris, states, "Our students are taught the fundamentals of how important it is to prioritize time for academics as well as life's given talents. To be a successful student-athlete requires hard work, sacrifices, and unwavering dedication, all of which are essential values needed to be successful in life." Balancing academics and athletics is no easy task, but with dedication and proper time management, students can excel both in their studies and in their chosen sport.

Being a student-athlete requires discipline and effective time management skills. Juggling practice sessions, games, and schoolwork can be challenging, but it teaches students invaluable skills that extend beyond the realm of sports. Student athletes learn how to prioritize tasks, set goals, and manage their time efficiently. Samuel Saldivar, Class of 2024, says, "It is important for the student to come before the athlete because academics always come first. You can't play if the grades aren't right. Even on a higher level like college, grades must be good. I personally believe maintaining good grades while playing sports teaches responsibility and accountability." These words are echoed by eighth grader and basketball team captain Maliyah Rosa, "Before any sport you would like to play in school, you have to remember you're in school first, and you have to be able to manage work while also managing your sport." By mastering these skills, student-athletes are better equipped to handle the demands of their academic workload and extracurricular activities. The discipline gained through sports helps students stay focused and organized, leading to improved performance and success in all aspects of life.

School sports provide an excellent platform for students to develop teamwork and leadership skills. In team sports, student-athletes learn the importance of collaboration, communication, and cooperation. They understand that success is not solely dependent on their individual abilities but on the collective effort of the team. Our Middle School Director of Athletics, Ryan Milian, reflects, "Student-athletes understand the importance of academics; it takes true leadership skills and draws on all of our six pillars to be just that. It takes more commitment and perseverance than many of us can imagine. The benefits of being a student-athlete do not only occur in the present - they last for a lifetime." These skills are transferable to the classroom and future professional settings, where collaboration and effective communication are essential. Eighth grader and basketball team captain Daniel Boateng shares, "The type of player you are depends on the type of student you are in the classroom. If you're a leader in the classroom, then you're a leader on the field. If you're active in the classroom, then you're active on the field." Through sports, student-athletes are often given opportunities to assume leadership roles, such as team captain or club president. These experiences foster confidence, responsibility, and the ability to motivate and inspire others.

Engaging in school sports contributes to the development of students' character. Sports teach valuable life lessons such as resilience, perseverance, and sportsmanship. Coach Vincent Calosso shares, "I love being a coach because I love helping my student athletes build character. It's more important for me to help them build character and change the mindset of our student-athletes rather than just winning games. Of course, I like to win games; who doesn't? But there's more to sports than just winning. I encourage my student-athletes to always carry themselves with respect and honor, no matter the circumstances. Even if we lose a game, student-athletes learn to keep their composure and lead by example because those qualities make a good team great." Student-athletes learn to accept both victory and defeat graciously, developing a strong sense of sportsmanship.

They also experience setbacks and challenges, which teach them resilience and the importance of perseverance. These attributes not only benefit them on the playing field but also in their personal and professional lives. Coach Jasmine Clark expresses, "It's more than a game! The mindset of the student-athlete is a growth mindset fueled with continual curiosity, not only in learning how to master gameplay but in

The Importance of Being a Student-Athlete: Balancing Academics and Athletics

cultivating self-discovery, pride, and joy." The character development that comes with being a student athlete equips individuals with the skills needed to overcome obstacles and achieve success.

Being a student-athlete is a rewarding and enriching experience. It promotes physical and mental health, teaches discipline and time management skills, fosters teamwork and leadership abilities, and contributes to character development. Balancing academics and athletics may require dedication and sacrifice, but the benefits and life skills gained are invaluable for future success. So, if given the opportunity, embrace the journey of being a student-athlete and enjoy the numerous benefits it brings.

Middle and High School Fall and Winter Sports: Soccer, Flag Football, Basketball, and Cheerleading



High School Flag Football



Middle School Flag Football



High School Boys Basketball



High School Soccer



Middle School Soccer



High School Girls Basketball



High School Cheerleading



Middle School Girls Basketball



Middle School Boys Basketball

FOR THE LOVE OF LEARNING

LION is committed to creating a strong literacy foundation for all students, beginning with a comprehensive program for elementary students that helps them build the fundamental literacy skills they need to thrive. We continue to provide students with the math and literacy support they need throughout their time at LION and offer advanced learning opportunities for all students, including high school-level courses for eighth graders and college-level courses for high school students. In this issue, we would like to provide an inside perspective on some of the important programs that are essential to a LION student's academic journey, from learning to love reading to preparing for the rigors of post-secondary education.

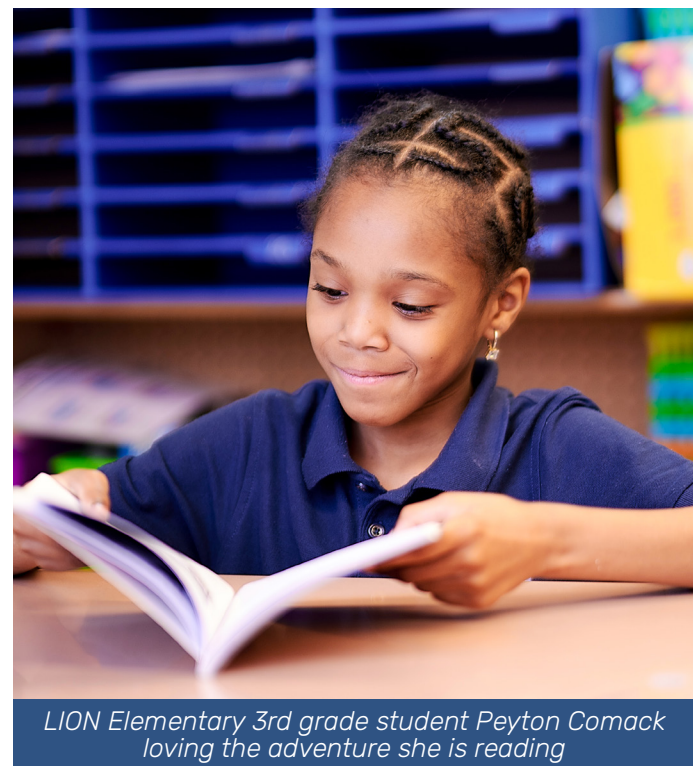
Guided Reading Elementary School

Guided Reading is an integral part of the foundational literacy program in LION Elementary School, offering opportunities for both advancement and support depending on individual student needs. Every four to six weeks, teachers use the Rigby assessment tool to measure students' progress and current performance. Teachers group students according to their current reading level and the skills they are working to develop. In addition to reading books as a group, teachers share students' goals with them, and students track their own progress on visible anchor charts for younger students or in personal folders for older students.



LION Executive Assistant Keveney McCrillis reading to our first graders during the Read Across America event.

Elementary Academic Dean Tiara Toney shared that the program supports LION students because it "allows teachers to meet students where they are." Additionally, she highlighted the importance of student participation and ownership of their learning from selection of reading material through "book shopping" to taking responsibility for their reading goals. In addition to encouraging student leadership and curiosity, Guided Reading fosters literacy skill development and growth as well as a passion for reading. Furthermore, teachers are able to build strong relationships with students as they read and learn together in a small group setting.



LION Elementary 3rd grade student Peyton Comack loving the adventure she is reading

Core5/PowerUp Middle School

As students progress to LION Middle School, Lexia's digital literacy programs Core5 and PowerUp have become valuable tools for literacy intervention and enrichment. These programs help students fill in any gaps in learning and build the necessary literacy skills to be prepared for high school by the time they complete middle school. Fourth and Fifth graders engage with Core5 on a daily basis, building a set of 21 skills that set a strong foundation for more advanced literacy work in older grades. Sixth-Eighth graders work with PowerUp three times a week, focusing on word study, grammar, and reading comprehension. The software consistently assesses students' progress and sets goals for every student, which are revised each time a goal is met.

The key to success, according to Middle School Academic Dean Cinnamon Lewis, is not only the time students spend engaging with the literacy software and the units they complete but also the teachers in the rooms and how they support students to achieve their goals. Teachers monitor the data constantly, help students who are stuck with 1:1 lessons, and conference daily with students. Ms. Lewis has witnessed the direct impact of strong investment from teachers across all grades on the success and growth students have demonstrated. Ultimately, completing PowerUp by the end of 8th grade ensures a student "has the skills they need" to be successful in high school and beyond.



LION 6th grader Jayden Martinez achieving PowerUp weekly goal

Advanced Placement (AP) Program High School

College readiness is a major area of focus for LION High School. We aim to ensure that students graduate LION prepared to embark on the post-secondary option of their choice. While simultaneously preparing students for Regents exams and providing them with the necessary tools to earn a New York State Regents or Advanced Regents Diploma, LION looks beyond Regents exams as a measure of student success. This year, LION is offering 10 AP courses, including two new pilot courses, AP African American Studies and AP Art & Design. LION has expanded Pre-AP options beyond core subjects to art and dance, preparing students for the rigor of college-level coursework across disciplines.

We believe that all students deserve the opportunity to engage in college-level coursework and have the potential for success with proper support. LION's recent receipt of the AP Access Award for providing all students with access to AP courses is a testament to this work. LION's ultimate goal is that all students who graduate from our school complete the AP Capstone two course sequence, AP Research followed by AP Seminar. High School Director of Teaching and Learning Sarah Schoonmaker explains that this goal "aligns with our vision for AP for All, which is backed by research and data that suggest exposure to AP courses increases college persistence and post-secondary success." We look forward to continuing this transformational work with our school community, increasing the opportunities for our students to engage in advanced coursework, growing the capacity and knowledge of our faculty, and graduating students who are prepared to be successful in their post-secondary endeavors.



LION Senior Abrianna Castro during an AP Presentation in front of her peers

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Continued...



Certificates of Recognition for LION families at our Family Celebration in June

One of the primary duties of Directors of Family Engagement is to establish and maintain effective communication channels between the school and families. This involves organizing regular meetings, both formal and informal, where parents and guardians can voice their concerns, share their ideas, and receive updates on school policies. By creating an open and transparent line of communication, the Directors of Family Engagement ensure that families feel valued, heard, and included in the decision-making process. Middle School Director of Family Engagement Vida Guerrero advocates, "I think that we've done a good job over the last three years engaging families and meeting them exactly where they are. Not every family can come to a school event at 6 PM, so we offer an 11 AM option to maximize the engagement. We also offer Zoom and phone call options for family-teacher conferences. We allow families to engage in the ways that work for them. I think that's what makes us so family-oriented. For us, family is who we are. The students identify their families differently from person to person. For certain students, the family members that show up for them might be their mom, aunt, grandmother, or even their siblings because that's just their family dynamic."

The Directors of Family Engagement collaborate with local organizations, businesses, and community leaders to provide additional resources and support to families in need. By establishing strong community partnerships, they create a network of support that extends beyond the confines of the school, ultimately benefiting the entire community. Healing the Broken Hearts has been serving the Hunts Point community since its establishment in 2011 and is led by LION parent Ana Faure, who has been an active member of the LION community for over five years. Healing the Broken Hearts is committed to making a positive impact in our neighborhood. Their weekly food distribution pantry is held every Saturday at 1 PM at 838 Hunts Point Avenue. The pantry is open to all families who require additional support, providing them with essential items needed in their household.

Another important responsibility of this critical role is to develop and implement family engagement programs and initiatives. These programs can take various forms, such as workshops, training sessions, or family-oriented events. By organizing these activities, the Directors of Family Engagement encourage families to actively participate in their children's education, thus creating a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. High School Director of Family Engagement Paola Bautista provided insight into the Family Celebration in June that celebrates family members who have met their LION commitment for the year. "Families are encouraged to attend at least eight family events throughout the year. At the end of the year, we create a special celebration for families that met the attendance goal with awards and exclusive swag for those members of the community. All K-12 families come together to celebrate this special occasion. It's also a good way to show students and families that we acknowledge and celebrate their dedication to our school by engaging in these special family events."

The Director of Family Engagement role is of paramount importance in today's educational landscape. By fostering collaboration, communication, and community involvement, this position plays a vital role in promoting student success and overall school performance. Through their dedication and advocacy, the Directors of Family Engagement empower families and create a supportive environment where every student has the opportunity to thrive. LION is committed to continuing to evolve our family engagement program and support one of our most treasured resources, our families. Thank you for your dedication and partnership in growing and strengthening our LION community.



LION Parent Adiran Jordan with Kindergartener Mulan Jordan posing beautifully at the Love Bug family event

LION Parent Dulce Osoria with 7th grader Arianny Bautista enjoying quality time at the Valentine's Day Pancake Breakfast.

LION Parent Shavon Hughley of High School Senior, Aleea Lopez, painting an original masterpiece at the Paint and Mocktails event.

Discovering Teaching as a Career Path to Help Others An Interview with Massaran Cisse

Alexandra Bardinias: Tell us about yourself.

Massaran Cisse: My name is Massaran Cisse. I was born and raised in the Bronx. I graduated with a bachelor's degree in Community and Applied Psychological Studies with a minor in LGBTQ Studies. I am currently a full-time special education teacher and a part-time behavior technician.

Share with us a brief overview of your experience at LION and how it prepared you for life beyond high school.

I remember being in Mr. Rodriguez's 8th Grade Algebra class. He told us, "If everyone is average, and you're ok with that, you will never stand out." After I transitioned to high school, I thought about what he said and decided to start with a clean slate. I did all my assignments plus extra credit and studied more for exams. I wanted to be above average and stand out, especially when I applied for college.

In August of my senior year, my peers visited the college office daily. Mr. Hittenmark stopped me one day and said, "Massaran, I have never seen you step foot in the College Office." I realized that for someone who cared about my future and education, I wasn't taking the college process as seriously as my classmates. From that day forward I went to the college office almost every day. I graduated feeling prepared for college and was awarded a Dell scholarship and a full ride at Ithaca College. LION really helped me to find and use my voice and become more independent.

How was your college experience? What advice would you give current students about how to make the most of their time there?

My college experience was not without its challenges. There were times I felt unmotivated, but I pushed through because I made friends and gained connections. LION taught us that working as a team can be beneficial and how to advocate for ourselves. I made it a priority to join my peers in the study lounge and make sure I got my work done. If I knew I needed an extension, I wrote an honest email to my professor, explained my circumstances, and asked for what I needed to complete my work.

My biggest takeaway is to move at your own pace and not focus on the journeys of others because yours is different. Life is not a competition - you must follow your own path. It is okay to make mistakes and learn from them.

What inspired you to become a teacher?

Honestly, I always knew I wanted to help people. As I learned more about psychology in college, I shifted from wanting to be a therapist to wanting to work with students with special needs. During my 120 practicum hours, I found that I loved being a teaching assistant and helping students with special needs at Easterseals in South Florida. I was introduced to the Teacher Accelerator Program and completed a teaching internship. That's when I realized I wanted to become a teacher, taking a different career path where I could still help people.

How have your personal experiences shaped how you connect with your students and create a positive learning environment?

As someone who has gone through financial hardships, I know some students go through things at home that can affect their learning. Making sure school is a place my students feel happy, comfortable, and safe is a priority for me as a teacher.

What is your favorite part of the school day?

My favorite part of teaching is when I am teaching group instruction and my students are smiling and happy to learn. I also love it when my students achieve their academic goals because it lets me know the techniques I'm using are effective.





Roxanne Clark
K-1 Academic Dean



I am an Academic Dean at LION Elementary School. I was born and raised in Harlem and now live in the Bronx with my son. I have always had a passion for working with children. As a teenager, I babysat all of my younger cousins. After finishing my undergraduate degree, I worked in a few daycares before deciding to go back to school to pursue a master's degree in Early Childhood.

I chose to work at LION because I really love how the school tailors educational programming to the whole child, including social-emotional needs. I also wanted to work within a community to help educate Black and Brown children similar to where I grew up. I feel strongly about giving back to my community by continuing to serve as an educator and role model for students. What I love most about LION is how family-oriented we are and the sense of community that exists here. I have been an educator at LION since 2015. It warms my heart to see how many siblings have cycled through my classroom over the years.

I am proud of my transition to Academic Dean this year and can already see the positive impact that I can have on teachers, students, and the school in this role. I enjoy being able to connect with teachers on a deeper level and help them strengthen their pedagogy. I look forward to growing in this role and being a voice for teachers as well as students.

Nora Charidah
HS English Teacher



I am an English teacher at LION High School. I was born and raised in Long Island and currently live in Queens. I discovered that I was really interested in education and supporting students of all different ages, backgrounds, and identities while studying criminology and sociology at Villanova University. During my time there, I tutored at the community center as well as individuals who were incarcerated. After graduating in 2018, I returned to New York and completed an AmeriCorps program with City Year New York where I worked as a student success coach in an elementary school in Harlem. It was through my experiences in college and City Year that I decided I wanted to be a teacher and began to pursue a master's degree. While earning a master's, I taught 7th and 8th grade English in Brooklyn. In 2023 I earned a Fulbright Scholarship and was lucky enough to move to Taiwan for a year where I taught at a bilingual middle school in Taipei, Taiwan. I love traveling and teaching so I am so lucky to have been able to do both of those things last year. When I returned from my year abroad, I was really excited to start at LION and continue being an educator in New York.

Our commitment to serving students and families is the primary reason I came to work at LION. The school's focus on empowerment and anti-racism are central to my teaching philosophy. I love our students' curiosity about learning about the world and how they can support individuals in our community and overseas. I enjoy teaching students to be critical thinkers and consumers of media. It is so important that we give our young people the resources to be successful in and outside of the classroom, and I find joy in doing that every day.

Cinnamon Lewis
MS Academic Dean



I am an Academic Dean at LION Middle School. I am also a LION parent of a 6th grader! I was born and raised in Mount Vernon, lived in The Bronx for 12 years, and now live in Connecticut with my family. As a child, I used to enjoy "playing school" with friends where I pretended to be the teacher. I always loved school and had a passion for learning, especially reading and writing. However, I had no idea I would become a teacher. I studied English and political science at Columbia University and initially believed I would become a lawyer. But plans changed when a friend encouraged me to apply to Teach for America. Once accepted, I taught for the first time during the summer at LION, which now feels like eons ago. I fell in love! I eventually started coaching teachers. I am proud to say that LION has been my home for about a decade.

I chose LION and continue to choose LION because I believe in educating the whole child, in restorative justice, and in closing the opportunity gap. Given some difficult childhood experiences I endured at home, school was my safe haven. I always wanted to help provide an experience for students that would be positive and memorable. What I love most about the LION community is our growth mindset. When it comes to students, families, policies, systems, etc., we never hesitate to make the necessary changes to be better.

I am proud of the work we have done in the ELA department this year. We demonstrated flexibility and perseverance as we made several hard but necessary changes to make the learning material accessible for all students. The greatest joy of my position as an Academic Dean is the authentic relationships I have built with teachers. Despite the inevitable challenges we face daily, I know I can lean on my teachers, and I hope they know they can lean on me! I also love witnessing teachers rejoice when students show academic growth. Teachers work hard every single day, yet the seeds they plant do not all grow at the same rate. So when the fruits of their labors emerge, it is an incredible feeling

Tavleen Kaur
Data Manager



My name is Tavleen Kaur, and I was born and raised in India. As a Data Manager at LION, my primary responsibility is to provide data-related support to both instructional and non-instructional teams. As a data team, we focus on establishing sustainable practices schoolwide to ensure accurate data. I also manage our school information systems, run the annual lottery, and manage all external reporting as a part of our compliance requirements. I am a Computer Science graduate with a master's degree in Data Science.

I have always enjoyed coding, solving equations, statistics, and troubleshooting in general. During my final year of undergrad, there was a buzz going around "big data," which intrigued me and eventually led me to recognize how data analytics play a crucial role in informing decisions and solving complex problems across different domains. Working at LION has given me the opportunity to use my data science background to help our school function better. It was challenging initially, but the challenge and learning have been my favorite part. To understand the perspective of data from an educational sector is a reward in and of itself.

I would advise students and anyone interested in a career in data management to understand the importance of building a strong foundation, and learn the relevant tools and technologies. Data Science is a promising field which gives you the flexibility to work in multiple domains; the possibilities are endless.

When I'm not knee-deep in data management, I enjoy various interests and hobbies. One of my favorite things to do is to try cuisines from all around the world-I love food! My favorite cuisine is, of course, Indian. My favorite food is Biryani, which is a mixed rice dish. I recommend topping it with raita, which is a yogurt dressing. It's absolutely delicious!

Elementary and Middle School

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DEVELOPING CHARACTER AND FOSTERING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IN
THE HUNTS POINT COMMUNITY



LION LEADERS
IN
OUR
CHARTER SCHOOL NEIGHBORHOOD

Spring for the Future:

**LION Charter School's
2024 Spring Social**

**Thursday,
May 30, 2024
6-8 PM**

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