



Kinder High School for the
Performing and Visual Arts

Welcome to our new staff for the 2024-25 school year!



John Barlow (Social Studies) has taught AP US, World and IB History for the last six years in Houston and China. He grew up in Kansas City and also taught internationally in Hungary, Ecuador and Egypt. He holds a M.Ed. as well as a J.D. specializing in environmental law. Outside of education he worked for UBS bank and for the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe.

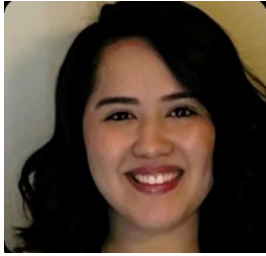
An avid reader, traveler, and hiker, he spent this summer visiting Germany, Malta, and the Tatra Mountains in Poland. He is excited to join the staff and community at HSPVA and looks forward to a successful year.



Jeffrey Derry (Math) has been an educator for 35 years, teaching mathematics and computer science, coaching wrestling, advising student honor societies, and mentoring colleagues has enabled me to positively influence the lives of many. His fulfillment is realized through the achievement, growth and happiness of those he encounters and caring for his mother, min-pin and sisters. Growing up in poverty, in a small rural town in Illinois, he earned varsity letters in football and wrestling and participated in choir, swing choir and dabbled in art. Upon graduating from Western Illinois University, in 1986, he joined Houston ISD. He hopes to continue to assist others through empowerment, knowledge, behavior, and perseverance.



Trey-Anthony Francois (English) is originally from Louisiana and graduated from LSU. After spending seven years in various business administrative roles, he transitioned into teaching, and this will be his fourth year in the profession. He was recognized as Beginning Teacher of the Year, served as department chair, and enjoys donating time to extracurricular activities. In his spare time, he loves discussing (at length) what a great TV show or book should have done differently (Game of Thrones).



Suhaily Garcia (Math) was born in Galveston, TX. She studied at the University of Houston-Downtown earning her Bachelor of Arts degree in Mathematics and a minor in education. Prior to joining HSPVA, Ms. Garcia was part of SHMSTC High School for four years. Ms. Garcia is in her third year of teaching mathematics.

Ms. Garcia loves drama aka binge watching shows and is a big foodie and an adrenaline junkie – she loves a good scream. In her free time, she loves exploring outdoors, traveling, and eating good food!



Mia Jackson (Special Education Chair) grew up in a small Texas town south of Houston and attended The University of Texas at Austin where she received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Bachelor of Science in Communication and Science Disorders. From there she went on to study Deaf Education/Deaf Studies at Lamar University where she obtained a Master of Science and teacher certification.

After being a Total Communication Teacher and Itinerant Teacher for students with Auditory Impairments, Ms. Jackson received her Educational Diagnostician Certification from Sam Houston State University. She has served as an educational diagnostician and ARD facilitator before coming to HSPVA. She is passionate about working with students with special needs and believes that all stakeholders have an important role to play in their education.

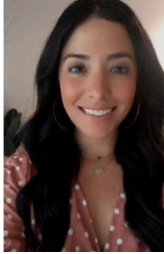


Nicole Walker Laforet (English) earned her BA from the University of St. Thomas in Psychology and English, with a -- very much loved -- minor in Theology. She also has an MFA in Poetry from the University of Houston. Over the course of her life and career, she has (if she does say so herself) created quite the bouquet of knowledge and creativity in her classroom. With a central purpose to inspire her students to live a life of passion through language and creative expression, Laforet has been known to

interrupt a boring lesson to challenge her students to write a silly poem that properly uses semi-colons or write a children's fable to illustrate the complexity that is human experience.

Laforet has spent the past ten years teaching and flourishing at Mickey Leland College Preparatory Academy for Young Men, a hidden educational gem of Houston ISD where she learned how to teach with bravery and unguarded love for the next generation of brilliant young souls. While there she was named HISD's Teacher of the Year. Outside of school, Laforet loves growing flowers and herbs and pretending she can watercolor. Videos of silly

animals keep her moving forward when she wants to shout the world down for taking itself too seriously (this includes herself).



Naomi Leos (Teacher Specialist) has been with HISD for 15 years. She takes pride in her experiences as an educator being a teacher assistant, a teacher, a specialist, a magnet coordinator, and an assistant principal. She is excited about this opportunity to be a part of HSPVA.



Terrell Lockett Sr. M. Ed. (Assistant Principal – Creative Writing, Instrumental & Vocal Music) is a dedicated educator with an unwavering passion for the arts. A proud alumnus of Emerson School for the Visual and Performing Arts in Gary, IN, where he graduated in 1996, Lockett has seamlessly blended his artistic inclinations with his professional endeavors in education.

With nearly two decades of experience, Lockett is entering his 19th year in the field of education, demonstrating a consistent commitment to fostering academic and creative excellence. His career spans various leadership roles, from campus-level positions to significant responsibilities within central office operations.

Houston ISD has been a cornerstone of Lockett's professional journey, where he notably served as a Special Senior Manager from 2017 to 2020. In this role, he leveraged his expertise to drive educational strategies and initiatives that benefited both students and staff across the district.

Lockett's unique blend of artistic passion and educational leadership continues to inspire and influence the communities he serves, making him a respected figure in the realm of education and the arts.



Laura Mathus (Registrar) is an educator of 18 years - 16 in the classroom, 2 as a Magnet Coordinator, and starting for the first time as a Registrar/Testing Coordinator. Working at HSPVA has been a longtime dream that she is finally realizing! Laura is the proud mother of two HSPVA students, one who just graduated and another who is a rising junior in Theater. Her husband is also a proud HSPVA volunteer who wishes he could audition for a seat in the instrumental department.



Ogechi Ukazu (Director, Band) is a doctoral candidate in wind conducting at the University of Texas at Austin. Most recently, she was Interim Director of Bands at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, WY. Prior to this appointment, she served as an Assistant Instructor at the University of Texas at Austin, Texas following her role as Visiting Instructor of Instrumental Music at the University of Mary Hardin–Baylor in Belton, Texas.

Ms. Ukazu holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Music Education from the University of Houston and a Master’s Degree in Conducting from Sam Houston State University. She began her career in Spring ISD, where, in 2011, the Claughton Middle School Symphonic Band performed at the Midwest International Band & Orchestra Clinic. In July 2022, Ms. Ukazu was named Associate Conductor of the Dallas Winds, one of the few professional (non-military) wind ensembles in the world. She has also served as the primary conductor for the Austin Brass Collective, a group of professional brass musicians in the Central Texas area that perform diverse programs of original works and arrangements in a variety of performance settings.

Ms. Ukazu is an avid proponent of high quality music education for all students and has presented on music education advocacy at workshops, clinics, and conventions around the state of Texas and the country, including the Texas Music Educators Association Convention, the Texas Bandmasters Association Convention, the Conn–Selmer Summer Institute, the Southern Methodist University Art of Teaching Music workshop, and the Sam Houston State University Teaching in the Middle School Band workshops.



James Westfall (Jazz) is a Houston native and graduate of HSPVA. After graduation he relocated to New Orleans, where he attended The University of New Orleans. There, he performed with and was mentored by renowned musicians like Harold Battiste, Ellis Marsalis, and Steve Masakowski. Early in his career, he performed at the Kennedy Center as part of the Betty Carter Jazz Ahead Program in 2002 and 2003. In 2003, he became the first vibraphonist accepted by The Thelonious Monk

Institute, where he performed with celebrated artists including Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Kenny Garrett, and Clark Terry at notable venues like the Tokyo Jazz Festival, Blue Note, and Blues Alley.

In 2007, while living in New York, Westfall co-founded ‘The Wee Trio’ (theweetrio.com), which performs across the country at venues like The Green Mill, Birdland, and Yoshi’s, and at major festivals such as The New Orleans & Heritage Jazz Festival and the Rochester Jazz Festival. The Boston Globe praised their debut album as a “winning debut.” While

living in New York Westfall also gained sideman experience with artists like Nicholas Payton, Terri Lyne Carrington, Chris Potter, John Ellis, and Gretchen Parlato. Westfall later relocated to Nashville to explore other genres, recording on over 45 albums and touring with Grammy winner BJ Thomas, Steelism, and Kristin Diable. He continues to perform and record with The Wee Trio, whose recent album features Fabian Almazan, Nir Felder, and Nicholas Payton.

Westfall is also a dedicated music educator, having taught as an adjunct instructor at The University of Southern Mississippi, The University of New Orleans, and Nashville State Community College to name a few. He is currently the Director of Jazz Studies at Kinder HSPVA in Houston, TX.