

Topanga Elementary Charter School | 2019-2020 Leadership Candidates



Koren Bertolli

Koren Bertolli loves kids and is inspired and delighted by their unique personalities and perspectives. Since her son Zach (currently in first grade) enrolled in TK at Topanga Elementary, she has enjoyed volunteering weekly in his class. Once upon a time a few decades ago Koren taught in LAUSD through the district intern program and also worked as a substitute teacher. Her current profession is founding member and Chief Administrative Officer of SonoSim, Inc, a medical education/technology company in Santa Monica. Prior to SonoSim, she worked in multimedia and commercial production, international relief, and importantly, as the lead female singer for a 50s lounge band in Waikiki. Koren is passionate about music and had the amazing opportunity to spend a year studying bossa nova in Brazil as a Rotary Ambassador of Goodwill, a theme that she attempts to apply to life in general.

Koren attended Columbia University for graduate school and Occidental College as an undergraduate. She speaks Spanish and Portuguese and plays the congas.



Mike Burke

My name is Michael Burke and I was born and raised in Los Angeles along with my 8 brothers and sisters. Starting next year I will have two children here at TECS. I attended Paul Revere and Pali High, so I am very familiar with the people of Topanga. Out of high school I opened and operated a furniture manufacturing company where I oversaw 20+ employees. I eventually handed off the company to pursue something I was more passionate about... a career in television (I know). I have been doing that for the last 15 years. Many of my life long friends are from Topanga and as a result they've exposed me to what this community has to offer. I have great admiration for what has been accomplished in Topanga and at TECS. I believe the values and sense of community here are something worth preserving.



S. Miria Jo

My wife, daughter, and I have lived in Topanga for five years. My daughter will be in second grade next year. We love our school! I work from home as a UX Designer (software and web design) and have a flexible schedule, so I'm available for Leadership meetings. I have been maintaining the Topanga Elementary website since 2015, when a previous member of the Leadership Committee asked for a volunteer. I'm currently on the VAPA committee, I volunteer for Art Trek, I do costumes for the play, and I'm a room parent, so you probably already get too many emails from me!

I appreciate the work the Leadership committee does and would like to be of service, especially in the coming year, when we will be resubmitting our Charter. I am committed to gathering input and building consensus with all stakeholders in our school and community, with regard to our Charter, and in all Leadership projects.



Kayt Jones

My name is Kayt Jones, I am a photographer and director. I am also mom to three terrific girls: Honor and Phoenix, both TECS alumni, who are now at middle and high school, and a kindergarten student, Roma. When we moved from London to LA 13 years ago, we settled in the area so that our children could attend this school, so I have known some of our wonderful teachers for over 10 years. As a former board member, first on TEP and then on Leadership for another few years, I can offer that experience as we work towards our shared goals.

I am running to be your leadership representative because I can bring an understanding of the needs of all grades, from K-5, and will advocate for all of them. I was part of the committee that supported bringing Technology into the classroom, and for our Charter to embrace our wonderful natural environment through an emphasis on Science and Arts. We can build on these achievements and embrace so many more opportunities, being collaborative and working together.



Candice Klein-Pereira

I am the mother of one love child, Griffin, who is a kindergartner this year in Mrs. Kort's class. My husband, Shawn Pereira, and I have been together for 27 years and we have lived in Topanga for the last 4 years. I am a trial lawyer at Panish, Shea & Boyle, LLP, representing tort victims for over 20 years. I'm currently Vice-Chair of the Women in Law group for Consumer Attorneys of Los Angeles (CAALA), and an active member of the organization. I am dedicated to helping those who are less fortunate and an advocate for women's and children's rights. I serve on the Board of Directors at Los Angeles Trial Lawyers' Charities (LATLC), a non-profit organization with a focus on issues related to education, children, survivors of abuse, persons with disabilities, and homelessness, by providing financial assistance and volunteer service to needy persons and groups in the Los Angeles area. I am also an active member of the Consumer Attorneys of California (CAOC).

I grew up in the San Fernando Valley and graduated from Calabasas High School. I have treasured Topanga Canyon my entire life, and I am so happy to be a part of this community. This year I have volunteered in my son's class on a weekly basis and I have had the pleasure of getting to know several parents, teachers and your amazing children. I am running for a seat on the Leadership Council because I would like to get even more involved with our school and I will strive to make improvements to TECS that will benefit every student. It would be an honor to be a part of the Leadership Council.

What is the Leadership Council?

The Los Angeles Unified School Board is the governing body for TECS. The Leadership Council is the school's site decision-making body. The Council's focus is to improve the quality of education, enhance the learning experience of each student, and promote overall student achievement.

Who can serve on the Leadership Council?

The ten-member council includes members who represent all stakeholders: administrator, teachers, classified (non certificated staff), parents (including legal guardians), and community members.

For more information, contact TECS: Email topanga-el@lausd.net | Phone: 310.455.3711
or visit <https://www.topangaelementary.org/leadership-council.html>



Dina Lockridge Vetri

Hi! I'm Dina Lockridge Vetri, mother to Phoenix in TK and Sage, in second grade. We have lived in Topanga for seven years and I've been a part of Topanga Elementary School for four years. I've volunteered throughout these years and am grateful to be a part of such a community that encourages parent participation.

I am a photographer, artist, and women's rights activist. I created and run WOMBYIN, which is a feminist-based nonprofit organization celebrating female and LGBTQIA photographers, artists, poets, musicians, directors, and dancers. We host fundraising events which all proceeds go to thwart human trafficking. I come from a family of philanthropists and will pass this down to my daughters. It's another reason I appreciate the volunteering efforts at our school.

I've been an entrepreneur since I was twenty-years-old, creating my own company and running it for ten years in New York City. I have a background in philosophical debate, public relations, creating partnerships, fundraising, and brand architecture. Raised by a hippie and world-renowned doctor, my passions are diversity, education, emotional intelligence, arts, technology, and science.

I look forward to continuing to contribute time and resources to our wonderful school!



Shawn Pereira

Hi, my name is Shawn Pereira. I am the proud father of Griffin Pereira in Mrs. Kort's class, and the happy husband of Candice Klein-Pereira. As a resident of Topanga and more so a parent of a Topanga Elementary Charter School student, I feel a responsibility to help resonate the goals and concerns of our school and community. As a model, musician and creative entrepreneur, I am dedicated and very used to working in concert with multiple energies, personalities and ideas to achieve a harmonious result. I look forward to the opportunity to effectively and efficiently elevate the quality of life for us all and especially the future of Topanga and the world, our little ones.



David Refsland

I have lived in Los Angeles for 17 years and for the past 3 years here in Topanga. My wife, Olga, is originally from Yalta, Ukraine and moved to the states at age 17. We have a son, Kai, who is just completing kindergarten and a daughter, Annika, who is two and a half. Over these past 3 years, it has become evident to us what a key role Topanga elementary plays in shaping and strengthening the Topanga community, and I am looking for an opportunity to contribute to that foundation through the leadership council.

I was raised in the Midwest by New Yorker parents, predominantly in St. Louis and Chicago. College brought me to New England, where I received two engineering degrees before coming to Los Angeles to attend UCLA's business school. I have focused most of my career working on innovative technologies that, beyond improving our lives, deliver social good. In that spirit, I currently work for a large media organization, focusing on initiatives that help ensure that local journalism can continue to exist and hopefully thrive once again. I recognize the importance of community involvement in school quality and hope I can contribute my abilities and experience to keep being the great educational experience that it is for my son, daughter, and the future generations that will be fortunate enough to attend the school.

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Amy Ruskin

My name is Amy Ruskin and I am the super proud mom of Bodhi Ruskin, who is just finishing Mrs. Chatham's second grade. This was our fourth year at Topanga Elementary. Bodhi has learned and grown under the watchful eyes of Mrs. Weisberg, Mrs. Kort, Ms. Winikoff and Mrs. Chatham, and it has been my pleasure to support them as a weekly parent volunteer in the classroom as well as at our school-wide events. Our younger son, Cooper, is currently at Children's Corner and will enroll in Mrs. Weisberg's TK in 2020.

In addition to being a mom, I am also a teacher. My husband, John, and I run the Ruskin School of Acting based in the Santa Monica Airport where I am the Director of the Young Actors' Classes, teaching kids 8-18 years old. The foundation of our classes is to foster confidence and teach kids how to connect to each other- a skill they take with them no matter what paths they choose in their lives. I've worked with families from dozens of private and public schools around Los Angeles. We also offered an after school program at Canyon Charter Elementary School for several years, where I got to work with Principal Sheard, formerly of Topanga Elementary, and got a taste of how the LAUSD system works. My husband and I also run the Ruskin Group Theatre, a non-profit company that survives on fundraising and grants. I am also a media training & communications coach (Netflix, Snapchat, IBD etc) working with executives to communicate and connect more successfully.

In another life, I produced reality television, supervising series for major networks and cable- a career that taught me the importance of organization and communication. While my own career has been arts based, I strongly support our science, math and technology programs. I attended private school growing up in New York City, and went on to study at Columbia University, La Sorbonne and earned my BA from Brown University. One of the things I have greatest appreciation for when looking back on my own education, is that, from the beginning, I was encouraged to try it all- from early computer programming to math to history to art, it was a well-rounded education which made it possible for each of us to pursue what we wanted as we grew up.

We all want the best for our children and it takes a ton of volunteer hours and fundraising to make any of it possible. So many parents, staff and teachers have worked so hard to get us the wonderful education that we have, and my family and I are so grateful. I'd be happy to offer my time and energy to keep the hard work going and to support our Topanga Elementary Community.



JB Whittenburg

I have worked as a teacher, literacy coach, makerspace coordinator, educational technology specialist and school administrator for the past 20 years in both public and private schools in Virginia and California. I have a Masters in Reading Education from the University of Virginia and received my Doctorate in Education in 2013 from USC.

My wife Fuji and I have 2 children currently enrolled at TECS- Farrah in 1st, and Henry in 3rd. We have been at the school since 2014, and are proud members of the Topanga community. I would be honored to serve on the leadership council to help support the efforts of committed teachers, parents and school leaders here at Topanga Elementary.