



Amanda Garcia

Residency Placement: 6th Grade Humanities, Aspire Alexander Twilight Secondary Academy
Mentor: Lisa Nguyen

Hometown: Glendale, California
Undergraduate University: Concordia University, Irvine
Degree Earned: BA in Business Administration and Leadership

My Inspiration to Teach: I am inspired by my mom who was a positive influence to many children while teaching in an urban school. I am also inspired by my two beautiful children who remind me every day that I am blessed and make me want to make their future a better place by having an influence on the children they will share that future with.

Why I Chose Aspire: I believe strongly that teachers should encourage students to think, question and strive for excellence. I love the focus that Aspire puts on college and success for all students. I am so excited to be a part of such a dynamic and inspirational organization.



Anel Torres

Residency Placement: 2nd Grade, Aspire Titan Academy
Mentor: Mike Montero

Hometown: Anaheim, California
Undergraduate University: California State University, Fullerton
Degree Earned: BA in History

My Inspiration to Teach: I feel teachers have the power to inspire change in students. I want to give that to low-income students who have utmost potential but face greater challenges in their day to day lives that can possibly hinder that potential. Students need guidance, support, and high expectations to be able to pursue their dreams and I would love to be that for them as a teacher.

Why I Chose Aspire: I was actually led to this program after applying to Teach For America. I thought I'd apply and go in without any particular expectations and I am so glad I made that decision. After completing summer courses with my cohort, I am so excited to start the year and begin teaching, but most of all learn all I can. I have experienced so much support and care since I have started, I feel like I am right where I need to be!



Anita Rodriguez

Residency Placement: 4th Grade, Aspire Capitol Heights Academy
Mentor: Brooke Aguirre

Hometown: Citrus Heights, California
Undergraduate University: California State University, Sacramento
Degree Earned: BA in Child Development

My Inspiration to Teach: I believe in the power of education. I know it can create opportunities and change lives. My love for children is what inspires me to teach. I love watching my students grow, learn, and conquer challenges that they once thought were impossible.

Why I Chose Aspire: I was drawn to Aspire for several reasons. I loved that with the ATR program you get to spend the whole school year in the same classroom. You get the opportunity to work side by side with a highly qualified teacher, which I find invaluable. I taught English overseas with the Peace Corps and knew that I wanted to continue working with students who might not get the opportunity for a great education if programs like Aspire didn't exist. I also wanted to work in an urban setting, and the fact that I can do that in my hometown is a huge plus.



Asha Wesley

Residency Placement: 1st Grade, Aspire Vincent Shalvey Academy
Mentor: Diana Puccio

Hometown: Memphis, Tennessee
Undergraduate University: LeMoyné-Owen College
Degree Earned: BA in English

My Inspiration to Teach: I encountered many teachers that inspired me. The fact that they cared about my education enough to go that extra mile, allowed me to be where I am today. I dream of inspiring others, just as those dedicated teachers inspired me.

Why I Chose Aspire: Aspire's goal to provide an equal education and college certainty for all of its students intrigued me. It focuses on the minority and their need for acknowledgement and understanding within the school curriculum. I admire Aspire's honesty, their perseverance, and their dedication to serve all.



Bertha Cazares

Residency Placement: 10th Grade Resource Specialist, Aspire Pacific Academy
Mentor: Sandy Hsu

Hometown: North Long Beach, California
Undergraduate University: University of California, Santa Barbara
Degree Earned: BA in Chicana and Chicano Studies

My Inspiration to Teach: I love working with children, and I want to be a part of the movement that uses research to close the education gap in urban communities.

Why I Chose Aspire: I chose the Aspire Teacher Residency Program because I believe in the co-teaching and gradual release approaches that the program utilizes. I wanted to be adequately prepared to serve urban schools well, and I wanted an exceptional professional mentor to support and guide me. At Aspire, I know there will be high expectations and learning will be rigorous.



Bianka Mariscal

Residency Placement: 3rd Grade, Aspire East Palo Alto Charter School
Mentor: Sarah Steinke

Hometown: East Palo Alto, California
Undergraduate University: Mills College
Degree Earned: BA in Psychology

My Inspiration to Teach: Ever since I was a student at Aspire East Palo Alto Charter School, my dream was to give back to my community by teaching. The teachers I had at E.P.A.C.S. were so nurturing, loving and extremely supportive—even throughout my years in high school and college. They always believed in my abilities and what I can do. The most important message my teacher's instilled into me centered on the belief that nothing is impossible. With their support, mountains became conquerable; walls became small hurdles and obstacles that were in the way of my dream became easier to overcome. My teachers were my role models and I want to be the same for kids coming from East Palo Alto. I want to show these kids that despite the odds against them they too can succeed and that no matter what I am here to support them and make that happen.

Why I Chose Aspire: I chose Aspire Teacher Residency Program because a lot of their values (such as the need for personal growth) merged with the many values that I grew up with and that directed my academic path at E.P.A.C.S., high school and college. More importantly, ATR emphasized the fact that learning is a continuous process, one that is both beneficial for the student and the teacher. I wanted to learn and grow from such two-way relationships, and I felt ATR could provide me with the knowledge to become an effective, open-minded teacher for East Palo Alto children.



Candelario Flores

Residency Placement: 5th Grade, Aspire Huntington Park Charter School
Mentor: Kristy Fernandez

Hometown: Downey, California
Undergraduate University: California State University, Dominguez Hills
Degree Earned: BA in Physical Education: Teaching

My Inspiration to Teach: My inspiration to teach is the great teachers at Aspire. I wish I had some of these great teachers when I was in school and I hope I can someday be as good a teacher as they are.

Why I Chose Aspire: I chose ATR because it will provide me the opportunity to work side-by-side and learn from one of Aspire's greatest teachers.



Carey Klein

Residency Placement: 3rd Grade, Aspire Junior Collegiate Academy
Mentor: Rachel Gray

Hometown: Chicago, Illinois
Undergraduate University: University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
Degree Earned: BS in Psychology

My Inspiration to Teach: My inspiration to teach came about when learning about the achievement gap and educational inequity. I have always been passionate about working with children and decided that teaching would be my way to do that. I believe that we all have "success" within us and I want to bring it out in those that don't believe it's there.

Why I Chose Aspire: I received a recruiting email from Nicole and decided to look into the program. As soon as I went to the website and learned more about the program, I fell in love. Aspire's vision and "college for certain" mentality is something I strongly believe in as well. After seeing what the program was about and meeting the people part of it, ATR seemed to be the perfect fit.



Christa Ogier

Residency Placement: 5th Grade, Aspire ERES Academy
Mentor: Courtney Walker

Hometown: Los Angeles, California
Undergraduate University: University of California, Davis
Degree Earned: BA in Classical Languages and Evolutionary Anthropology, emphasis in Archaeology

My Inspiration to Teach: When I was younger, I had a difficult time learning how to read and do simple math. So much so, that if I went to a regular public school I would have been placed in remedial classes or would have "disappeared" into the class. While working with kids in varying capacities throughout my 4 years at UC Davis, I saw so many kids who were exactly like me: quiet, shy, who learned differently and at their own pace. I want to give scholars a learning environment where all types of learners can learn and succeed. I want them to feel like they are achieving something and know that with enough passion and hard work, their dreams can become reality.

Why I Chose Aspire: I chose ATR for many reasons. One, because it was the only program where I would receive my masters and credential while working with kids and get to have a mentor teacher. Two, I knew that all of the mentor teachers are types of teachers I aspire to become. Three, it was a rigorous program that would prepare me for my career as a teacher. Finally, I believe in Aspire's mission to close the achievement gap and wanted to have an active role in achieving this mission.



Courtney Norton

Residency Placement: 1st Grade, Aspire Titan Academy
Mentor: Raul Gonzales

Hometown: Madera, California
Undergraduate University: California State University, Fresno
Degree Earned: BA in Speech Language Pathology

My Inspiration to Teach: I was raised in the Central Valley, where the education gap is very apparent. I chose to teach because I want to help give all children an equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background. I believe that education is the most effective way to break the cycle of poverty, but many students do not receive a quality education because of our broken system. I chose to teach because I believe that it is the best way to make a difference in a child's life. I do not see teaching as just a job. I see it as a lifestyle and a privilege. The opportunity to work with students and equip them with the skills necessary for prosperous futures is an incredible gift.

Why I Chose Aspire: I chose Aspire because of their commitment to underserved areas. The collaboration within Aspire is something I greatly appreciate, as well as the family-like atmosphere of all Aspire schools. I believe the Aspire Teacher Residency Program is the absolute best training you can receive, and I feel like no other program equips you for success in urban schools the way that ATR does.



David Nutt

Residency Placement: 10th Grade Biology and 12th Grade Anatomy & Physiology, Aspire California College Preparatory Academy
Mentor: Jai David

Hometown: Edgecomb, Maine
Undergraduate University: Dartmouth College
Degree Earned: BA in Environmental Science

My Inspiration to Teach: I teach because it is more challenging than being an astronaut. I teach because it is more exhilarating than being a secret agent. I teach because it is more fun than being a pro-athlete. I teach because it is more personal than being a physician. I teach because it is more timely than being a reporter. I teach because it is more real than anything else in the entire world.

Why I Chose Aspire: I joined the Aspire Teacher Residency to find out if all the hype behind Aspire is true. Aspire students have a 99% college acceptance rate? Aspire students have a 95% graduation rate? Aspire students have an 87% college persistence rate? These numbers are amazing! I want to be part of the change Aspire is making in young people's lives and futures.



Emma Simmons

Residency Placement: 4th Grade, Aspire ERES Academy
Mentor: Laura Strait

Hometown: Burlington, Massachusetts
Undergraduate University: Hamilton College
Degree Earned: BA in Creative Writing, Minor in Hispanic Studies

My Inspiration to Teach: I chose to pursue urban school teaching because a quality education changes lives and promotes social justice. Children in urban settings like East Oakland are the most likely to change the world because they have more reasons to push back against the structures and institutions that aren't working for them. But they can only change the world if we give them the tools and opportunities to do so. I am honored to be a part of this change. I am looking forward to the challenge of growing with my students and the joy of learning about their perceptions and passions.

Why I Chose Aspire: Aspire builds school environments that foster respect and open-mindedness among all learners, and I want to learn how to teach in this type of community. Although I have only been a part of the cohort for a few short weeks, I have already benefited from the support and encouragement that the residency program provides. I feel at home among this group of ambitious, idealistic, insightful, loving teachers.



Heather VanWallendael

Residency Placement: 6th Grade Self-Contained, Aspire ERES Academy
Mentor: Laney Hammond

Hometown: Gold Hill, North Carolina
Undergraduate University: University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill
Degree Earned: BA in English and Philosophy

My Inspiration to Teach: I have been inspired to teach by the many teachers I had who fostered in me a love of learning and the hunger to pursue the big question, why? I continue to be inspired by the students I interact with in the classroom.

Why I Chose Aspire: I chose ATR first because I believe in its mission. I want to prepare my students so that college is an option for everyone. I also chose ATR because I believe the program is one of the best of its kind to turn me into the best teacher I can be. I believe the residency model and the ATR goals, support structures, and people will effectively help me in my growth as a teacher.



Jake McMurrin

Residency Placement: 7th Grade Humanities, Aspire Langston Hughes Academy
Mentor: Lourdes Colon

Hometown: Stockton, California
Undergraduate University: Missouri Baptist University
Degree Earned: BS in Administration of Justice

My Inspiration to Teach: My inspiration to teach comes from a long list of inspirational coaches. During my time playing baseball, I experienced the positive influence coaches had on children. It is my goal to build that type of inspirational relationship with my students.

Why I Chose Aspire: I grew up in Stockton and I understand firsthand how hard it can be to find a good school. I believe in the mission of Aspire and I would enjoy making a difference in Stockton.



Jenna Bryant

Residency Placement: 2nd Grade, Aspire APEX Academy
Mentor: Christina Murphy

Hometown: Lodi, California
Undergraduate University: Sonoma State University
Degree Earned: BA in Liberal Arts with Distinction

My Inspiration to Teach: I love giving students the tools they need to develop a love of lifelong learning.

Why I Chose Aspire: I love the mission of Aspire Public Schools. I love the idea of helping students, who may not have reached their potential in a traditional classroom, excel.



Jennie Wu

Residency Placement: 7th Grade Special Education, Aspire Ollin University Preparatory Academy
Mentor: Katie Spencer

Hometown: Irvine, California
Undergraduate University: University of California, Riverside
Degree Earned: BA in Spanish

My Inspiration to Teach: I'm inspired to teach because working with kids has always been something I felt interested and passionate about. I think it's when I feel the happiest! I want kids to know success is a process and comes in many different forms; it is something unique to each individual.

Why I Chose Aspire: I chose ATR because a friend told me about teacher residency programs, which I had never heard about before. I did some research on the internet and kept coming across Aspire. I read about the organization and loved the mission and feel of it. I absolutely love the supportive and family-like culture at Aspire. It feels right, and I am so happy and thankful to be a part of it.



Jim Whitlock

Residency Placement: 7th & 8th Grade English Language Arts, Aspire Lionel Wilson College Preparatory Academy
Mentor: Eva Kellogg

Hometown: Tomales, California
Undergraduate University: San Francisco State University
Degree Earned: BA in Spanish

My Inspiration to Teach: I want to provide my students with the inspiration and the opportunity that my teachers and mentors have given me. Education has provided a great deal of opportunity and enrichment in my life, and I hope to pass that on to my students.

Why I Chose Aspire: I chose the Aspire Teacher Residency because I wanted to pursue my training as a teacher in a program that offered a combination of academic learning and classroom experience. The Aspire Teacher Residency provides an opportunity for me to develop the skills to be a supportive and effective teacher while I study the educational theories that support the work that I do in the classroom. Aspire also allows me to accomplish this while working in a rigorous and high-performing urban school.



Judith Alejandra Gonzalez-Membreño

Residency Placement: 9th & 10th Grade Spanish, Aspire Golden State College Preparatory Academy
Mentor: Deanna Price

Hometown: Hayward, California
Undergraduate University: University of California, Davis
Degree Earned: BA in Spanish and Design

My Inspiration to Teach: Being born in a low-income community and attending low-income public schools, I have learned it is not easy to achieve a higher education. Yet, I want to be a teacher that opens children's eyes and families to the reality of misconceptions. I aspire to teach for change where students learn to embrace their cultures and see the true power of knowledge. I want to create a safe learning environment where all children are viewed as unique individuals capable of greatness. Not only do I teach because I see education as a vaccine for violence, but because I want to be a part of the movement for social change.

Why I Chose Aspire: Aspire's core values and mission is what I stand for. I cannot imagine myself working anywhere else and want to continue to grow in an organization that values higher education. In the end, I aspire to inspire community members who need it the most.



Karen More

Residency Placement: Kindergarten, Aspire Junior Collegiate Academy
Mentor: Maria Vizcaino

Hometown: Point Pleasant, New Jersey; Rochester, Michigan; New York, New York
Undergraduate University: Saint Mary's College
Degree Earned: BA in Performing Arts

My Inspiration to Teach: I am inspired to teach because I love working with children. I want to be part of the process that helps children realize their unlimited potential. I want to help children collect the tools that will lead them down the path of their highest expectations.

Why I Chose Aspire: I was drawn to the Aspire Teacher Residency by the passion and dedication of the people who make Aspire possible. In addition, the opportunity to work with a mentor teacher while earning a master's degree and teaching credential is an ideal situation for learning and growing. When I walked through the doors of Aspire for my interview, my first impression was that it was a wonderful place to be. I am grateful and proud to be an Aspire Teacher Resident.



Karen Schreiner

Residency Placement: 2nd Grade, Aspire Berkley Maynard Academy
Mentor: Ami Hanaoka

Hometown: Rockland County, New York
Undergraduate University: Boston College
Degree Earned: BA in Human Development & English

Graduate University: Boston College
Degree Earned: School Counseling Psychology

My Inspiration to Teach: My inspiration to teach lies in my commitment to social justice and the belief that quality education for every child can serve as a democratizing force in our society.

Why I Chose Aspire: I chose ATR due to Aspire's commitment to developing and supporting effective teachers who are committed to teaching as a life-long profession. The intense mentorship component was *the* driving force in bringing me to ATR. I'm very excited to learn and work alongside an incredibly talented master teacher on a daily basis!



Kolanje D. Thomas-Alexander

Residency Placement: 3rd Grade, Aspire Inskeep Academy
Mentor: Joanna Hayman

Hometown: Memphis, Tennessee
Undergraduate University: University of Memphis
Degree Earned: BA in Political Science

My Inspiration to Teach: My inspiration to teaching is to help prepare students not only just go to college, but as well as graduate from college.

Why I Chose Aspire: I chose Aspire Teacher Residency because this program is dedicated to creating effective teachers that care about student success and student growth.



Lara Heisser

Residency Placement: 7th Grade Math/Science, Aspire Ollin University Preparatory Academy
Mentor: Marlene Singh

Hometown: Pleasanton, California
Undergraduate University: Loyola Marymount University
Degree Earned: BA in Psychology

My Inspiration to Teach: There is a need for enthusiastic and dedicated educators to confront the achievement gap. I want to be a part of the movement and provide excellent instruction for our youth in order to develop our future leaders of tomorrow.

Why I Chose Aspire: I chose ATR because of the incredible professional development, resources, and community of support. In order to be highly effective, I have a lot to learn and I feel the ATR model will provide me with the opportunities and experiences necessary to positively impact my students.



Mimi Karabulut

Residency Placement: 4th Grade, Aspire Rosa Parks Academy
Mentor: Michelle Shackelford

Hometown: Franklin, Michigan
Undergraduate University: University of Michigan
Degree Earned: BA in International Studies and Political Science; Minor in Social Work

My Inspiration to Teach: I teach because I love to learn, know, and share – all qualities I can find as a classroom instructor.

Why I Chose Aspire: The residency program uniquely uses co-teaching as a training tool that enables Residents to effectively learn to teach while also earning a Master's degree in only a year! I love efficiency, so this was a good fit for me.



Monica DeSantiago

Residency Placement: 6th Grade Math/Science, Aspire Berkley Maynard Academy
Mentor: Pamela Saberton

Hometown: Fort Worth, Texas
Undergraduate University: Brown University
Degree Earned: BA in History and Policy

My Inspiration to Teach: I believe that all students are capable of success. I chose to become a teacher in order to eliminate achievement gaps and to create an education system that is exceptional regardless of zip code.

Why I Chose Aspire: I loved the mentoring aspect. I believe all students deserve a teacher who is confident in their ability to teach them, rather than somebody who is figuring it out as they go along. I wanted the chance to learn in a safe, inclusive environment and to receive feedback on my teaching skills EVERY SINGLE DAY.



Ramiro Flores, Jr.

Residency Placement: 8th Grade English & History, Aspire Ollin University Preparatory Academy
Mentor: Keith Drucker

Hometown: Huntington Park, California
Undergraduate University: University of California, Santa Barbara
Degree Earned: BA in English

My Inspiration to Teach: My inspiration to teach came to me when I was playing Pokemon. I want to become something similar to a Pokemon trainer, raising these small creatures (the students) and turning them into valued additions to my team (the classroom) by teaching them techniques in order to survive in battle (life or society).

Why I Chose Aspire: I feel that ATR has my goals aligned with theirs, and they are ready and willing to train me to be the teacher I wish to become. They have already done so much to help my little brother catch up in school and turn him into a scholar, and I have seen each and every step they took to help him get to that point. It was then that I realized that I wanted to join ATR because they genuinely care about their students and wish nothing more than to see them succeed in life.



Sam Lloyd

Residency Placement: 5th Grade, Aspire Berkley Maynard Academy
Mentor: Jay Stack

Hometown: Santa Barbara, California
Undergraduate University: University of California, Berkeley
Degree Earned: BA in Political Economy

My Inspiration to Teach: I love being around kids. Their curiosity and enthusiasm to learn about the world is contagious. I'm excited to have the opportunity to help future generations gain the skills and knowledge to grow and change their lives, their communities and the world in a positive way.

Why I Chose Aspire: I chose ATR because I believe it is one of the strongest teacher training programs I could find. I like that we get to spend so much time in the classroom and learn by doing and experimenting. I like the culture that Aspire has and the focus they have on creating community teachers and schools that are responsive to the needs of families.



Samantha Hill

Residency Placement: 5th Grade, Aspire Summit Charter Academy
Mentor: Veronica Romero

Hometown: Hanford, California
Undergraduate University: Fresno Pacific University
Degree Earned: BA in Liberal Studies

My Inspiration to Teach: My love for learning and of children has always had my heart set on teaching.

Why I Chose Aspire: The opportunity to teach in a classroom full-time while earning my credential could not be passed. I admire and agree with Aspire's teaching philosophies and goal of College for Certain for every student.



Shawna Koga

Residency Placement: Kindergarten, Aspire River Oaks Charter School
Mentor: Karma Frame

Hometown: Stockton, California
Undergraduate University: California State University, Sacramento
Degree Earned: BS in Business Administration and Accounting

My Inspiration to Teach: The inspiration for me to become a teacher is the desire to make a difference in a child's life and to help each child achieve his potential. I hope to create life-long learners who will enter adulthood as critical thinkers equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to make positive changes in their schools and surrounding communities.

Why I Chose Aspire: I chose the ATR program because I believe every child should have the opportunity to attend college, and Aspire affords its children this opportunity. Aspire prepares children for college readiness despite obstacles faced. I wanted to be a part of a community where high expectations and a rigorous learning environment are the norm and every child's culture is considered a valuable asset.



Sheree Parker

Residency Placement: 4th/5th Grade, Aspire APEX Academy

Mentor: Melissa Brookens

Hometown: Richmond, California

Undergraduate University: California State University, Hayward

Degree Earned: BS in Business Administration, Emphasis in Computer Information Systems

My Inspiration to Teach: I desire to become an effective teacher because of my compassion to help others learn and reach their highest pinnacle.

Why I Chose Aspire: I chose Aspire because of their vision and mission to inspire students to reach their full potential and give them the desire and capability of getting a higher education-College. I want to be that teacher that lights that fire in all my students.