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# The Bronx High School of Science Alumni Foundation

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## Alumni Newsletter | June 2020

*Learn about Bronx Science alumni leading the fight for justice, alumni at the frontlines of the pandemic, honorees of 2020 as well as the latest Class Notes and more in this month's newsletter.*

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## Honoring the Class of 2020

The Class of 2020 has completed their time at Bronx Science during one of the most turbulent times in history. While it is a bit hard to imagine, the school year is coming to a close and the Class of 2020 is preparing to graduate. The Class of 2020 has shown tremendous grit, perseverance and compassion for the world around them. We are hopeful about them as future leaders and changemakers.

Our commencement speaker this year is the embodiment of the future leader we hope the Class of 2020 becomes. A scientific expert, a pioneering CEO and an experienced leader

at complex institutions during difficult times, we are honored to announce that Hall of Famer **Wanda Austin '71** will serve as the graduation speaker.

*Wanda M. Austin is an American businesswoman who is internationally recognized for her work in aeronautics and systems engineering. She is co-founder of MakingSpace, Inc., a systems engineering and leadership development consultant, and a motivational speaker. She is the author of Making Space: Strategic Leadership for a Complex World. She served as interim president of the University of Southern California for the 2018-2019 academic year, and led the institution through a crucial transition period. She is the former president and CEO of The Aerospace Corporation, an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to the application of science and technology toward critical issues affecting the nation's space program. From January 2008 to October 2016, Dr. Austin led the organization's 3,600 employees and managed annual revenues of \$950 million at 17 U.S. locations. She retired after 37 years of service.*

*Dr. Austin served on the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology until January 2017, advising the president of the United States in areas where an understanding of science, technology, and innovation was key to forming effective U.S. policy. She is an honorary fellow of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, a counselor of the National Academy of Engineering, and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She sits on the Board of Directors of the Chevron Corporation, Amgen Inc. and Virgin Galactic Holdings. She has served on the USC Board of Trustees since 2010. USC has awarded her its Distinguished Alumni Award, an honorary doctorate, and its highest honor, the Presidential Medallion.*

*Dr. Austin was born in New York City. She graduated from the Bronx High School of Science in 1971 and was inducted into the school's Hall of Fame in 2018. She earned a B.A. in mathematics from Franklin & Marshall*



**Dr. Wanda M. Austin '71**

*College, M.S. degrees in systems engineering and mathematics from the University of Pittsburgh, and a Ph.D. in industrial and systems engineering from USC. Dr. Austin and her husband Wade have two adult sons, two daughters-in-law, and five grandchildren.*

We anticipate that graduation will be livestreamed – we will share the link as we get closer for any alumni who wish to view the ceremony.

The Bronx Science Alumni Foundation is committed to celebrating the Class of 2020. We are working closely with the school to hold virtual celebrations for the National Honor Society Induction, Senior Awards, Speech & Debate convocation and more. All of these ceremonies will appear on the [Bronx Science YouTube channel](#) after they take place for anyone who wishes to view them. All seniors will receive their yearbook in the mail as a gift from the Alumni Foundation, and, when we are able, we are planning an in-person prom for the Class of 2020.

## **Bronx Science Alumni Fighting for Justice**

We are proud of the Bronx Science alumni advocating for equality and justice in the fight against institutionalized racism and state violence. We know many in our community are struggling and together, we all must find ways to improve the world around us. The Bronx Science Alumni Foundation is committed to supporting the efforts of our students, faculty, alumni and the broader community. We wanted to highlight the actions that the Bronx Science Alumni Foundation is taking in the fight for justice.

- **New York State Police Reform** – The New York State legislature has committed to convene from June 8-12, 2020 to address a series of bills that are on the forefront of making changes to the criminal justice system.



**Sen. Jamaal T. Bailey '00**

New York State Senator **Jamaal T. Bailey '00** is the leader and key sponsor of these efforts. We are long-time, active supporters of Senator Bailey and are proud to stand with him in these efforts. Below are the bills he is sponsoring; we encourage all alumni to reach out to their government representatives to show your support.

- **S36975/A2513** – Senator Bailey '00 proposes the repeal of section 50-a of the civil rights law which allows law enforcement officers to refuse disclosure of "personnel records used to evaluate performance toward continued employment or promotion." This exemption was adopted in 1976 by the Legislature in order to prevent criminal defense lawyers from using such records in cross examination of police witnesses during criminal prosecutions.
- **S2571/A4053** – Another bill sponsored by Senator Bailey '00 aims to reduce unnecessary arrests. This bill would require police officers and peace officers to issue appearance tickets to individuals charged with certain offenses instead of arresting such individuals.
- **S2574/A1601** – Senator Bailey '00 is also the prime sponsor of a bill to codify into law the special prosecutor's office within the state attorney general's office to investigate incidents in which civilians die during interactions with the police. The office was created by Executive Order in 2015 in order to remove the investigatory powers from local district attorneys over concerns over conflicts of interest with police.
- **Student Leadership** – Bronx Science students are lending their voices and talents to help fight injustice to provide a better world. On June 10, 2020, Baboucarr Gaye '20, together with BOSS/WIS and the Student Organization, are holding a school-wide Town Hall to allow all Bronx Science voices to participate in conversation about this

moment in the history of the Black Lives Matter movement.

**The Bronx Science Alumni Foundation has committed to fully funding the ideas and initiatives developed by our students.** We are working closely with the school to make sure they have all the necessary financial resources as well as connections to alumni for mentorship. We are proud of our students' efforts and action.

We know that this is a difficult time for many students and the school has expanded efforts into counseling and mental health. The school has relationships with the Jewish Board for Family Services and with Albert Einstein School of Medicine to provide students with free counseling services. In addition, the lead school social worker, Ms. Heckman, can connect students with specialized resources they may need. The Alumni Foundation is committed to making sure our guidance office has the financial support they need to serve our students.

- **Supporting the Bronx** – As good neighbors and citizens of the Bronx, we have a responsibility to our home borough to provide support. We want the Bronx to thrive and we want to make sure that the residents of the Bronx have our support. In particular, we are very committed to children in the Bronx thriving academically and want educational efforts to succeed. We have provided support to the below organizations.
  - THE POINT – “dedicated to youth development and the cultural and economic revitalization of the Hunts Point section of the South Bronx...[a] central feature of THE POINT’s services offers after-school and summer programming for 500 young people in grades 1-12.”
  - Bronx Business Relief Fund – “provides immediate assistance in the form of grants to small businesses with 20 employees or fewer to assist with employee retention, fixed costs and modifications to business

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modeling to meet the new needs associated with combating the COVID-19 pandemic.”

- The Bronx Defenders – “a public defender nonprofit that is radically transforming how low-income people in the Bronx are represented in the justice system and, in doing so, is transforming the system itself.”

There are many organizations, both locally and nationally, that are doing excellent work. The Bronx Science Student Organization has compiled a list of resources on organizations to support and resources for all of us. You can find their list [HERE](#) if you are interested in learning more about possible organizations to support.

We know this is just a start. We are working closely with local politicians about other efforts to support the Bronx. They are looking for volunteers to help develop lists of Black-owned businesses in the Bronx and businesses that may need extra help during this time, if you are interested in helping, please email [alumnifoundation@bxscience.edu](mailto:alumnifoundation@bxscience.edu).

Please also tell us about your fellow alumni who are doing great things and making a difference so we can recognize their work.

Finally, we want to highlight this powerful article by Hall of Famer **Neil deGrasse Tyson '76** on his own experiences: "[Reflections on the Color of My Skin](#)."

We stand in solidarity with our Black students, alumni, parents, faculty and community. We want to say thank you to all alumni who are standing up to create a more just society. Black Lives Matter.

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## Bronx Science Alumni Confronting the Pandemic

As the world looks for solutions to fight the global pandemic, we are so proud of our fellow Bronx Science alumni who are making headlines for their incredible work.

- Dr. **Stanley Plotkin '48** — known as the "Godfather of Vaccines" for his achievements in immunological research and advocacy — is joining in efforts to develop a coronavirus vaccine. Learn more [here](#).
- Writing in the *New York Times*, New York Public Library president and Bronx Science Hall of Famer **Anthony Marx '77** advocates for expanding public libraries' digital resources and services in this era of social distancing. Read Marx's piece [here](#).
- Dr. **Michelle Ng Gong '86**, Chief of Critical Care at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, describes how she and her teams have been managing rapid-response emergencies in the CBS special *Bravery and Hope: 7 Days on the Front Line*. Learn more [here](#).
- In the *New York Times*, acclaimed author and Bronx Science Hall of Famer **Min Jin Lee '86** expresses special gratitude for food service workers during these times. Read Lee's essay [here](#).
- Molecular biologist Dr. **Raquel Lieberman '94** is one of the leading scientists contributing to the efforts of Georgia's COVID-19 State Lab Surge Capacity Task Force, an initiative that aims to develop large-scale production of coronavirus tests. Learn more [here](#).
- In the *Washington Post*, prize-winning journalist **Robert Samuels '02** analyzes how racial biases impeded cities' public health responses to the pandemic. Read Samuels' article [here](#).



Dr. Michelle Ng Gong '86



We want to say thank you to all alumni who are first responders and essential workers, who are doing what is necessary to help make the world better, safer and stronger.

If you know a fellow alum who is making a difference, please share their story with us at [alumnifoundation@bxscience.edu](mailto:alumnifoundation@bxscience.edu) so we can recognize them!

## Celebrating Bronx Science Students

We want to congratulate and recognize some of our talented Bronx Science students on their achievements in national competitions.

- **ExploraVision Science Competition Prizes** – We congratulate the Bronx Science team of Lavanya Manickam '21 and Mithila Dey '21 for being the Regional Winners and being awarded second place Nationally in the ExploraVision science competition! Fourteen teams of Bronx Science juniors also received Honorable Mentions. The world's largest K-12 science competition, ExploraVision asks contestants to envision how current science technologies and techniques could be developed in the near future to address an ongoing problem or challenge. Learn more about the ExploraVision projects from Bronx Science students [here](#).
- **National Merit Scholarship Winners** – Eleven Bronx Science students have been recognized as National Merit Scholarship Winners. Congratulations to Jennifer Brown '20, Christopher Chi '20, Zoe Cooper '20, Jaime Jacob '20, Harper Learmonth '20, Alexander Losonczy '20, Suzune Montag '20, Jeffrey Munsell '20, Benjamin Nicastro '20, Brooke Schnitzlein '20, and Maya Schuchert '20.
- **New York Times Learning Center's STEM Writing**



Lavanya Manickam '21



**Contest Winner** – Bronx Science Student Aliya Fisher '22 contributed one of the eight winning essays in the *New York Times* Learning Center's inaugural STEM Writing Contest. Congratulations to Aliya on her winning essay, "[Circadian Rhythms: The Conductor of Our Body's Symphony.](#)"

## Bronx Science Alumni Foundation Events

### Bronx Science All Alumni Call 2020

Date: June 17, 2020

Time: 7:00–8:00 p.m.

Location: Virtual (link will be sent to registrants shortly before the event)

Join the Bronx Science Alumni Foundation for an all alumni call to hear an update about the school and the Bronx Science Alumni Foundation. **Principal Donahue '77** will share highlights of the Bronx Science school year and how the school community has adapted. Alumni Foundation President **Sang Kim '88** will share about the Alumni Foundation's efforts to help the school and our plans for the future.

[Register](#)



## Class Notes

*Faculty Update:* Sadly, **Dan Thorn '61** has informed us that retired Bronx Science social studies teacher **Ken Allen** passed

away after having contracted COVID-19.

**Alice Coopersmith Furst '49** (known at Bronx Science as **Alice Mae Levine**) has also sadly passed away from COVID-19. Furst belonged to the first class of girls admitted to the Bronx High School of Science.

We are remembering nuclear scientist-turned-Pennsylvania state legislator **Ivan Itkin '52**, who has passed away following a distinguished career in both nuclear engineering and progressive politics. Our thoughts are with the friends and family of the esteemed “Godfather of Connecticut healthcare law,” **Stephen Ronai '53**, who recently passed away as well. Ronai’s family cites Stephen’s time at Bronx Science as a pivotal moment for him and the Ronai family. We are also remembering the life and legacy of late civil rights attorney **Richard Sobol '54**, who combated racial discrimination in employment practices in New Orleans and across the state of Louisiana. Sobol managed to bring a case before the United States Supreme Court that secured the right to a jury trial in state criminal cases. It is with heavy hearts we share that **Martha (Kallinisch) Szuminskyj '55** passed away in March. After graduating from Bronx Science, she earned a bachelor's and a master's degree in Home Economics at Hunter College and then taught Home Economics for more than 35 years in New York-area middle and high schools. We also acknowledge the recent passing of Dr. **Richard Friedman '57**, author of the landmark 1988 book *Male Homosexuality: A Contemporary Psychoanalytic Perspective*, which demonstrated a biological basis for homosexuality that contradicted prevailing notions of homosexuality as a perversion to be cured. We unfortunately learned that **Scott Gillam '59** passed away in March from complications due to Parkinson’s Disease. Scott was an editor and writer who got his start on the Bronx Science newspaper. **Susan Greenfield Pashman '59** announces that her new book, *Journey to a Temple in Time: A Philosopher's Quest for the Sabbath*, was published in February by Vallentine Mitchell, the London-based press that was first to publish Anne Frank’s diary. Pashman’s book is part memoir, part philosophical argument for why modern-day skeptics ought to keep the Sabbath — even if one doesn't believe in God.



Submit

Prize-winning poet and professor **Bernard Horn '61** announces that his new book of poems, *Love's Fingerprints*, will be published in November. The collection has received advance praise from Carl Dennis and Major Jackson. Horn's first collection, *Our Daily Words*, was listed as a finalist for the 2011 Massachusetts Book Award in Poetry. His translations from Hebrew have appeared in *The New Yorker* and other magazines. Horn is also the author of *Facing the Fires: Conversations with A. B. Yehoshua* (1997), the only book in English about Israel's preeminent novelist. We are thinking of **Stephanie "Steffi" Robinson-Lewis '62**, who passed away following a long illness. She excelled in math at Bronx Science and later earned an MBA from the University of Pennsylvania before embarking on a career in municipal finance. Married to philosopher David Kellogg Lewis from 1965 until his death in 2001, Steffi moved in the world of professional philosophers and published her wry personal essay "Etc." in the edited collection *Singing in the Fire: Stories of Women in Philosophy* (2003) alongside contributions by such prominent philosophers as Martha Nussbaum. Steffi also served as long-time treasurer and participant in the Princeton Research Forum, a community of independent scholars. **Jacob (Jack) Love '69** shares that he has received his doctorate in History from the University of Tennessee in December 2019 on the topic of the origins of the Passover Seder. He had taken a "temporary" leave from the History program at UC-Berkeley in 1978 and is now teaching at U. Tennessee in the Religious Studies Department. **Robert A. Spiegel '69** took lawyer emeritus status in the DC Bar in 2019 and is currently enrolled in the Tufts University Certificate in Advanced Graduate Study in Urban Justice and Sustainability program. He retired from a long career in the federal government in 2007. His sexual minority rights movement activity is recounted in NYU's *Stonewall at 50* documentary and the Fall 2019 issue of *NYU Law Magazine*. As a Virginia ACLU board member, he persuaded the Arlington County government to extend its human rights ordinance to lesbian and gay people in 1989. He currently serves as a member of the Executive Committee of the Stonewall Veterans Association.

**Lloyd Prezant '70** celebrated his 40th anniversary working at

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NBCUniversal in Rockefeller Center, NYC. He is so thankful that his Bronx High School of Science education has helped him to lead a very successful and happy life! He wishes all his classmates well.

**Christina Bater '80** has been named among the Forbes 2020 Top Women Wealth Advisors! A partner in the independent Barrett Asset Management investment firm, Bater was recognized for her holistic wealth management approach to working with multi-generational, high-net-worth family clients. It pains us to share **Javier Cordero '88** passed away suddenly in March. Described by his family as “an amazing renaissance man,” Javier was passionate about sailing, bird watching, reading French books and preventing climate change. A positive and loving person who cherished his family and friends, he always took the time to check in on others, had a ready laugh and always appreciated the humor in any situation or circumstance. He leaves behind his beloved wife Helen and his son Sage.

Dr. **Ridhima Ghei '10** announces that she has launched a weekly video interview series called *First Gen Tales*, which features first-generation immigrants and how they are developing their careers in the United States. “I know Bronx Science had many first-generation immigrants,” Ridhima writes, “and if any alumni would like to tell their stories, I would love to hear them.”

*Please share your news with fellow Bronx Science alumni by submitting a Class Note for the next newsletter.*

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## Support Bronx Science

Today, more than ever, there is an urgent need for a science-based education. We are counting on all our alumni to [make a donation](#) to Bronx Science before the fiscal year ends on June 30th.

**Alumni ensure Bronx Science excellence.** Alumni fund the wide-ranging programs that equip our talented students with a transformative education. **Alumni close the gap:** with the NYC Department of Education granting only \$300 per student for academic enhancements, Bronx Science relies on alumni generosity to offer thought-provoking electives and labs, extracurricular activities, college and career preparation, and more. With more than 44% of Bronx Science students living below the poverty line, alumni donations also provide all our gifted students access to resources they need to thrive. **With rising unemployment and significant impact on small businesses, we know that even more Bronx Science students will need our help.**

Our goal is to raise **\$2 million** to help provide Bronx Science students with all the resources they need to thrive.

Please [make a donation](#) TODAY to help support our talented students.

**Donate by:**

**Phone:** 718-817-7800

**Mail:** Please make checks payable to the Bronx Science Alumni Foundation, and mail them to [75 Bronx Science Boulevard Bronx, NY 10468](#)

**Online:** [www.bxscience.edu/give](http://www.bxscience.edu/give)



[Donate Online](#)

**Thank you to all alumni for your generosity and support. Please consider ways you can help Bronx Science students and st**

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