

Chaffee, Sydney

Page: Candidate's Basic Information

Candidate Name

Chaffee, Sydney

State

Massachusetts

Page: Candidate's Resume Information

Education

Lesley University, Cambridge, MA - M.Ed.: Curriculum and Instruction

Dates (MM/YY)

9/05 - 05/07

Education

Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, NY - BA (Concentration: Women's History and Writing)

Dates (MM/YY)

09/01 - 05/05

Education

Dates (MM/YY)

Certification

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, ID #02758963: Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts

Dates (MM/YY)

11/15

Certification

MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education License, #414429: English 8-12, History 8-12, English as a Second Language 5-12, Sheltered English Immersion Teacher Endorsement

Dates (MM/YY)**Certification****Dates (MM/YY)****Experience**

Codman Academy Charter Public School, Boston, MA

Dates (MM/YY)

06/07 - Present

Experience

EL Education, Various Locations

Dates (MM/YY)

06/13 - 08/13

Experience

Citizen Schools, Boston, MA

Dates (MM/YY)

06/05 - 07/07

Experience

Part-Time Instructor, Boston University School of Education

Dates (MM/YY)

10/16 - Present

Leadership

Massachusetts Teacher Advisory Cabinet

Dates (MM/YY)

09/16 - Present

Leadership

TeachPlus Commonwealth Teaching Policy Fellow

Dates (MM/YY)

08/16 - Present

Leadership

Teacher Representative, Instructional Leadership Team

Dates (MM/YY)

06/16 - Present

Awards and Other Recognition

Co-Presenter, EL Education National Conference, Detroit, MA

Dates (MM/YY)

10/16

Awards and Other Recognition

Author, MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: Teachers' Top Three

Dates (MM/YY)

09/16

Awards and Other Recognition

Finalist, EL Education Klingenberg Teacher of the Year Award

Dates (MM/YY)**Awards and Other Recognition**

Fund for Teachers Fellow

Dates (MM/YY)

6/11 - 8/11

Additional Resume Items

See Resume

Page: Candidate's Professional Biography

Professional Biography

Sydney Chaffee is a National Board Certified Teacher passionate about helping diverse learners grow through authentic, relevant, interdisciplinary curricula. As the ninth grade Humanities teacher at Codman Academy Charter Public School, an EL Education school, Sydney strives to infuse the hard work of learning with joy. She believes that all students can learn with appropriate supports and challenges, and that education is a transformative tool for social justice. Her students build literacy skills through a unique partnership with Boston's Huntington Theatre Company and internalize and apply what they have learned through collaborative projects centered on the theme of "justice and injustice." Sydney also serves as Humanities Department Chair, co-coordinator of a weekly all-school Community Circle, and a member of the Instructional Leadership Team. Since 2010, she has mentored pre-service teachers from Tufts University and Boston University. In 2013, Sydney worked as a consultant on EL Education's curriculum design project, collaborating with educators from across the country to write 8th grade ELA curricula. Since their publication, these curricula have been downloaded more than 3 million times and implemented by over 1,000 schools nationwide. During the 2016-2017 school year, Sydney was a member of Massachusetts' Teacher Advisory Cabinet and a Teach Plus Policy Fellow. As Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, Sydney has appreciated opportunities to collaborate with colleagues from across Massachusetts, advocate for the profession to be elevated and respected, and continue to learn from her students. Sydney earned a B.A. from Sarah Lawrence College and an M.Ed. from Lesley University.

Page: Application Question #1

Question 1

On the first day of school, I ask students to dive immediately into historical inquiry. They begin by assessing whether they agree or disagree with statements like "Christopher Columbus discovered America" and "Christopher Columbus is a hero." Then, they read excerpts from Howard Zinn's *A Young People's History of the United States*. Finally, they work collaboratively to apply evidence from that text to the creation of a "Mind Mirror" illuminating Columbus's traits. This lesson is the beginning of a unit called "How to Think Like a Historian." Having problematized the traditional narrative of Columbus's encounter with indigenous people, students learn to analyze texts for bias, question sources' reliability, and make recommendations for how schools should teach Columbus. I have refined this lesson over time to incorporate new learning, so it reflects some of my best thinking, as well as my values and beliefs, as a teacher.

This lesson highlights my belief that all students deserve equal access to a high-quality education. It includes scaffolds and supports to ensure that my classroom is a safe learning environment for diverse learners. I revised the lesson after taking a course on supporting ELLs, so it now includes previewing key vocabulary, "amplifying" the text with footnotes and questions, using visuals, and providing sentence stems for discussion. These accommodations also assist students with special needs. In addition, I "chunk" the text into shorter sections, give students several chances to read and respond, and incorporate graphic organizers.

This lesson also requires students to collaborate. I encourage students to "share brains" and work together because being able to work and communicate well with others will serve them for the rest of their lives. To facilitate healthy collaboration, I hold students accountable for meeting learning objectives based on the Common Core State Standards for "Speaking and Listening," as well as my school's character objectives of Compassion, Collaboration, and Critique. We practice collaboration almost every day, and I regularly ask students to reflect on and set goals for group work.

This lesson centers on "Justice and Injustice"—the official title of my class and a compelling theme for our work. Throughout the year, I encourage students to see themselves as having the power to make change in the world based on lessons from the past. By asking students to think like historians and question what they have been taught (even by

me!), I tell them that their ideas are valid and valuable. They use textual evidence to co-create knowledge as a classroom community, rather than passively receiving pre-determined facts.

Education must be authentic. There is no use in studying history if we believe it to be static and irrelevant to the future. Basing this lesson in open-ended questions, such as, “Should we celebrate Columbus Day?” hooks students’ interest by connecting the past to the present and encourages them to take risks as learners to discover answers. It also allows us to do the compelling interdisciplinary work of Humanities: building literacy skills through intense study of historical content.

Page: Application Question #2

Question 2

In 2008, in response to student and staff feedback, I led a successful effort to revamp our traditional school assembly into an engaging, student-led weekly Community Circle. Today, Community Circle is an integral and much-loved component of my school’s culture. Strong school culture—marked by joyful community—is a critical component of student success. When students feel welcomed in school, when they feel that school is a place where they are loved and appreciated, they can become instrumental in creating and maintaining that culture.

The task of mounting a weekly all-school gathering—and shifting the culture of that gathering—requires significant work, and I knew I could not make it happen alone. I worked to design structures that would support students in running the show. Now, each week, I coordinate a group of students and staff to plan and lead Community Circle. Students, from ninth to twelfth graders, brainstorm, write scripts, choose music, and rehearse together. On the morning of the show, these students help set up the theater, DJ, work as stage managers, and act.

Community Circle has become a site of joy. Both students and staff look forward to Thursday mornings. It is a sacred space in our school’s schedule that cannot be interrupted or moved. It is a forum for celebration. On any given week, Community Circle might feature “Scholars of the Week” who have positively contributed to the school community, a performance by our award-winning slam poetry team, announcements of seniors’ college acceptances, or public kudos for community members who have demonstrated our school’s “Habits of Scholarship” that week. We also incorporate “Crewlympics,” friendly competitions that pit crews, or advisory groups, against one another; a recent competition asked each crew to design and present a “crew flag” that communicated the group’s spirit and identity. Annually, beginning in the winter, every single senior in our school presents a “Senior Talk” at Community Circle, a personal talk modeled after Socrates’ Apologia and given “in defense of their lives.” These Senior Talks are received with reverence by the rest of the students.

Community Circle is also a place where our community can gather to discuss serious issues. Recently, students designed and led a “Conversation Nation” in which they facilitated a school-wide conversation on bullying. Last year, after a murder that affected many of our students, a local community organizer came to speak to the school about promoting peace in the neighborhood. Other community members who have spoken at Community Circle include local police officers, YMCA staff, and students’ family members.

Community Circle has helped shape our school community. It builds on our values of communication, collaboration, and celebration. It is one of the most important parts of my school’s culture and identity, and I am incredibly proud of it—not only because I led the charge to redesign it, but also because it has grown into something that is created by many different members of our community, students and staff alike.

Page: Application Question #3

Question 3

I work at an EL Education (formerly Expeditionary Learning) school where we often say that “the world is our classroom” and ask ourselves how we can engage kids in authentic, relevant learning experiences that help us build a stronger community.

In my class, the history that we study connects to something bigger. Re-learning the story of Columbus’s encounter with the natives underscores the importance of being a critical thinker. Learning about the Haitian Revolution and its aftereffects helps students understand the colonial roots of injustice. Learning about apartheid helps students think about how activists fight for justice. Learning about Puerto Rico’s relationship with the United States pushes students to think about people’s agency, as well as how to envision a more just world. Each of these units provides unique opportunities to connect to the world around us.

To complement our study of South African history, I have invited South Africans into our classroom. These conversations have resulted in students’ most enduring understandings of apartheid. They have also gained a much more nuanced understanding of how racism operated in the lives of white people in South Africa by speaking to them directly. Students have also given back to these visitors, many of whom have been teachers and administrators, by talking to them about life in American schools.

In the spring of 2015, as a capstone project for our study of Puerto Rico, students wrote letters to Congress. This process was academically valuable, helping students build argumentative writing skills, but it was also grounded in real-world work: arguing either for or against a bill that would have made Puerto Rico a state. This project helped students better understand their political agency.

I have also worked to build bridges between my students and the Codman Square Health Center, our neighbor and community partner. In 2015 and 2016, I coordinated school-wide summer reading initiatives in which students and health center staff read the same texts, then came together to discuss. These conversations promoted dialogue among the residents of our shared campus.

One of our most crucial community partnerships is with the Huntington Theatre Company. All year, ninth graders learn to act and mount a full-scale play in the spring. This partnership exposes students to cultural experiences that help them build literacy, and it also benefits Huntington staff, who become members of our school community and gain teaching experience.

Currently, my students are studying the Haitian Revolution, learning that Haiti’s crippling poverty can be traced to colonialism. Hurricane Matthew’s recent devastation provides us another opportunity to extend our learning, and my students and I have begun brainstorming fundraising ideas.

This work requires that students understand learning as broader than how we often envision what happens inside classrooms. Authentic learning enables students to see and create connections in the world. By framing my class as a place where students do the real work of writers, actors, and historians, I encourage them to see themselves as active community members who have a stake in shaping their world.

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Question 4

The effect of systemic racism and historical oppression on students of color, especially as manifested in the school-to-prison pipeline, is an issue that educators cannot ignore. As a white educator, it is my duty to educate myself and work against this injustice.

In my first year of teaching, I had to design and teach a unit on the Haitian Revolution. I was too embarrassed to admit this, but I had never even heard of this revolution. Humbled, I realized that my education had occurred within a racist system that privileged Eurocentric achievements. I would need to do significant work to correct my ignorance.

Examining my own privilege—“unpacking the invisible knapsack,” in the words of Peggy McIntosh—is behind-the-scenes work I owe to my students. Theory becomes reality inside my classroom. After taking a course called “White People Challenging Racism,” I thought more carefully about my responsibility to challenge racism. After reading the work of Lisa Delpit and Christopher Emdin, I questioned my use of certain management techniques. Currently, I am implementing alternatives to traditional behavior management systems, such as more frequent and open parent contact. Building relationships with families helps me become a part of the support network holding students up, rather than pushing them out.

My school’s standards-based grading system is a more just and equitable way to assign students grades. It allows me to grade students on what they know, rather than their effort or behavior. I offer students opportunities to revise their work to improve their understanding and their grade. Last year, a student who missed weeks of class due to severe emotional disturbances passed my class due to these revision opportunities. In a traditional system, he almost certainly would have been retained, putting him on a path towards potential dropout.

I also work to create a culturally-relevant curriculum. When we study apartheid, my students make connections to the Black Lives Matter movement. The authors whose books we study in depth are primarily people of color. My curriculum centers on justice and injustice, ideas which urban students of color are well-versed in and hungry to discuss.

As a TeachPlus Policy Fellow, I engage others in this issue on my own time. With other teachers, I am researching the school-to-prison pipeline in order to take action on a state-wide scale. I am excited about this opportunity to collaborate and gain access to policymakers who can effect real change that results in greater equity for my students.

Education is a tool for social justice. It can empower students to stand up for themselves and create change. It can only do this, however, if teachers like me hold ourselves and each other accountable for confronting the system’s historical inequity. It can be difficult and painful to confront the ways I have been implicit in oppression, but students deserve teachers who will work alongside them to make the world a more just place.

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Question 5

On my first day of kindergarten, after my mother dropped me off at school, she got back in the car and drove to her first day of school, having re-enrolled in college after twenty years away.

I did not realize it then, but the most important lesson of my mother’s return to college was her modeling of how one must be simultaneously optimistic and daring to be a lifelong learner. By returning to school, she taught me that growth requires taking risks.

I have not learned everything there is to know about teaching. Like my mother and many other teachers, I too am a lifelong learner. I have committed myself to taking risks so I can constantly grow.

I have risked having confidence in crazy ideas. I have risked insisting that every one of my students must perform in front of an audience. I have risked teaching students the history of youth protest movements—and have watched as they then organized a school walkout. I have risked pushing myself to grow. I have risked examining my own privilege and being open about the ways that it has made my life profoundly different from my students’. I have risked taking leadership opportunities that intimidated me. I have risked challenging ideas with which I did not agree. I have risked believing that my students are smarter and more capable than popular narratives say they are.

I have not done this work alone. No teacher does. So many of my colleagues and students have been my teachers in this work. They have taught me to be patient, empathetic, resilient, and creative.

As Teacher of the Year, I have committed to taking risks for my students, to representing them well and demanding that

they are recognized for their achievements and strengths. I have committed to listening to them, sharing their ideas, and fighting for their right to a great education. I have committed to being courageous, which means I have tried do the work I always ask them to do: asking questions, admitting my ignorance, and working hard to grow, even when it scares me.

Education is powerful if educators take risks—on our students, on each other, and on ourselves.

My mother took risks her whole life. That September, she walked into a classroom after being told since childhood that she was stupid. She ran headfirst into a terrifyingly uncertain future—risking the failure she had been assured was her destiny—and earned two degrees.

My mother’s legacy is alive in my belief that without taking risks, we doom ourselves to stasis, to a life without discovery or the thrill of accomplishing the impossible.

When smart, driven teachers are given time and space to collaborate, we can help all of our students in all of our schools succeed. We have a lot of work to do, but we can achieve so much for kids when we commit—together—to being simultaneously optimistic and daring.

Page: Supporting Evidence

Letter 1

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Letter 2

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Letter 3

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