



**BEARS**  
BASIS INDEPENDENT  
BROOKLYN

## BASIS Independent Brooklyn Faculty Biographies



### **Ms. Bunkers Teaching Fellow**

Ms. Bunkers is a teaching fellow at BASIS Independent Brooklyn. In 2012, Ms. Bunkers graduated from Oberlin College with a degree in Biology, specifically focusing on botanical and ecological studies. She is excited to integrate her love of environmental studies and her degree in Biology into her students' learning.

Ms. Bunkers participated in research at the Chicago Botanic Gardens relating to the invasive Cheatgrass in Utah, as well as at Oberlin College regarding invasive rose species and hybridization in Ohio. During her undergraduate experience, Ms. Bunkers traveled to Australia to learn about the continent's uniquely diverse flora and fauna. She worked with LandCare Australia to restore habitats that were nearly choked out by invasive species and contributed illustrations to their book about the importance of local native species, specifically in the Brunswick Valley.

Ms. Bunkers will also be leading a **Smarty Plants** project during BASIS Independent Brooklyn's Project Week. The project aims to excite 1st and 2nd graders about the diverse botanical world and the importance of plants and greenspaces in our lives!

### **What GOING GREEN means to Ms. Bunkers:**

Much like education, "going green" is about securing a happy, healthy future for our children and generations to come. "Going green" is about working individually and as a community to minimize harm to the environment and maintain ecological balance. It is understanding the influence we have on our environment, as well as the environment's importance outside of our immediate desires. By making choices with the good of the greater community in mind, we can sustain a harmonious relationship with the planet.



**Mr. Chen**  
**Subject Expert Teacher, Mandarin**

Upon receiving his Bachelor of Science in Environmental Engineering and his master's degree in Nuclear Engineering from Shanghai University, Mr. Chen traveled to Tibet to volunteer in a youth program where he participated in classroom teaching and organizing cultural events. He also worked with Qtalk Publishing LLC to develop the QTalk method being used worldwide to teach many languages.

Mr. Chen is the head of our Mandarin department and an active practitioner of the “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” principal. He is very conscious of the resources that he uses and tries to reduce material waste as best he can by using less paper, reusing teaching materials, and collaborating with other teachers to share supplies.

**What GOING GREEN means to Mr. Chen:**

To me, it means living a more minimalistic life by consuming less goods, using what I already have, and having fewer possessions in general. I also choose the paperless option whenever possible and love being outside and going to parks with my family. I believe that finding contentment and meaning in life is a powerful motivation to taking care of our planet.



**Ms. Cushman**  
**Subject Expert Teacher, English**

Ms. Cushman attended Brown University and graduated in 2010 with a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature. Within the English department, she focused on creative nonfiction, and wrote her senior Honors thesis about her family's enduring relationship with the coast of Maine and the ocean. In 2015, Ms. Cushman graduated from the New York Academy of Art with a Master of Fine Arts in Painting. Her graduate thesis focused on contemporary Maine seascapes.

Ms. Cushman currently teaches English and Literary Magazine to grades 8 and 9 at BASIS Independent Brooklyn. When she started teaching, she was constantly printing off handouts and homework assignments for her students. She has recently switched over to Google classroom. This change has significantly cut down on hers and her students' use of paper.

**What GOING GREEN means to Ms. Cushman:**

For me, "going green" means reducing my environmental footprint (and having my students do the same). It also means talking about the environment in literature classes at BASIS Independent Brooklyn. For example, my grade 9 class focuses on descriptions of nature and "The Sublime" in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.



**Mr. D'Amato**  
**Subject Expert Teacher, English**

Mr. D'Amato earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio with a double major in English Literature and Creative Writing. He then moved to New York City to complete his Master of Arts degree in English literature at Brooklyn College. While at Brooklyn College, he helped establish the school's first Graduate English Conference, which drew scholastic participants from all over the country and will be celebrating its tenth year this spring!

Over the past decade, he worked as a dedicated Professor of English and Writing at both Brooklyn College and York College, and as an expert 6th - 12th grade English and Language Arts teacher at other private institutions in the Greater New York City Area. While he specializes in Language Arts, Rhetoric, Composition, and Literature, he has also created and taught specialty research courses in film and drama.

Mr. D'Amato is currently a Subject Expert Teacher who instructs middle school students in English Language Arts, Literature, and Writing. "I cannot express how excited I am to be teaching at BASIS Independent Brooklyn! Growing up with and truly getting to know my students has really proven to me that being an educator is my lifelong passion and calling," Mr. D'Amato recalls.

Moreover, he has initiated BIB's first philanthropic extracurricular: ECO Club! As an Environmentally Conscious Organization, ECO seeks to green our school in as many ways possible. Since its inception, ECO Club has made its presence known through artistic demonstrations and creative messaging throughout the school building. While many may dream of getting solar on the roof with a small container garden below, the reality is that we have much more practical matters to address like the school's current waste management system, teacher waste, and reusable water bottles.

**What GOING GREEN means to Mr. D'Amato:**

Hopefully ECO and BASIS Independent Brooklyn will be able to equip students of all age bands with the knowledge and love necessary to keep our Earth's environment as healthy as possible. There are very real threats that our children, my students, will face as they become adults. They will inherit a very different world than the one I grew up in back in the 80s... With green hearts, I wish to remind everyone that "Every day is Earth Day!" and that every eco-friendly action, no matter how small, will add up to something much, much larger in the end.



**Ms. D'Orazio**  
**Subject Expert Teacher, Physical Geography & AP Environmental Science**

Ms. D'Orazio graduated from Goucher College in 2014 with a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Biology. During her time at Goucher College, she spent a semester abroad in Cork, Ireland, at University College Cork, where she conducted independent research in field ecology: collecting and analyzing soil biota based on climate. Ms. D'Orazio also has her master's degree from CUNY Brooklyn College in Teaching in Secondary Science Education with an emphasis on Life Science.

Before joining the BASIS Independent Brooklyn community, Ms. D'Orazio taught AP Environmental Science at a private school in Brooklyn. She is excited to bring her experience and passion for sustainability and environmental education to BASIS Independent Brooklyn for the upcoming 2018–19 academic year, when we will offer AP Environmental Science for the first time!

Students taking AP Environmental Science will learn how to research, present their data, and provide a solution for a specific environmental problem. Ms. D'Orazio strives to introduce a student-run composting program and educate her students on the challenges of waste management.

Ms. D'Orazio also plans to use her field work experience of surveying soil biota and climatic influences on soil composition and plant growth to lead her students on an exploration of Red Hook's industrial history and its long-lasting impacts on the natural environment.

**What GOING GREEN means to Ms. D'Orazio:**

As an educator, "going green" has evolved to include a responsibility to instill curiosity and a desire for knowledge in my students. There is no age too young to learn about the responsibility we have to our Earth and how we can be stewards of this precious environment. Going green means supporting students throughout their exploration of realistic and meaningful solutions to environmental hardships and learning by trial and error. I uphold the idea that if students are given an opportunity to spend time outdoors and connect with nature, they will be environmentally minded individuals who value the earth.



**Mr. Galloway**  
**Physical Education Teaching Fellow**

Mr. Galloway has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Environmental Studies with a minor in German from the University of Arizona. While at the University of Arizona, Mr. Galloway did fieldwork involving sustainable development issues, public policy analysis, and community engagement, including projects researching the sustainability of farmers' markets versus commercial farming in Tucson, Arizona. In 2014, Mr. Galloway studied abroad in Leipzig, Germany where he had the opportunity to observe German approaches to sustainable development and green technology.

Mr. Galloway and his sister own an off-grid cabin in Northwestern New Jersey that is part of a community that owns 700 acres of wilderness common land. In 2014 their community, the Longwood Lake Cabin Owners Association, entered into a Conservation Program Contract with the Natural Resources Conservation Service under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program for the creation of new wildlife habitat on 50 acres of common land, with a focus on the Golden-Winged Warbler. Mr. Galloway is part of the Association's working group that continues to manage this project.

Prior to joining BASIS Independent Brooklyn in early 2017, Mr. Galloway interned with SolarOne, a Brooklyn-based solar company focusing on residential solar installation. During that same time, he interned with Manhattan Community Board 1, surveying and assessing neighborhood infrastructure in Lower Manhattan.

Mr. Galloway started working at BASIS Independent Brooklyn in 2017 as a Teaching Fellow who assisted in administrative support and substitute teaching for all grades. In fall 2017, Mr. Galloway began teaching Physical Education to PreK–grade 2. In his classes, he encourages healthy and sustainable choices like recycling, exercising frequently through walking and biking, eating healthy, and conserving electricity and water.

**What GOING GREEN means to Mr. Galloway:**

For me, "going green" means being conscious of how our actions affect the environment. It means to always do what I can to reduce my carbon footprint; for example, by recycling, conserving water and electricity, and by growing my own vegetables and herbs using compost I create with plant matter and crushed grapes from wine-making waste.



### **Mr. Kaponyas** **Learning Expert Teacher, Grade 1**

Mr. Kaponyas went to Hunter College for his undergraduate work and studied English literature. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts with cum laude honors. Mr. Kaponyas returned to Hunter College to complete his graduate work in early childhood education (birth–grade 2).

Mr. Kaponyas joined BASIS Independent Brooklyn as a grade 1 Learning Expert Teacher. Mr. Kaponyas chose BASIS Independent Brooklyn because it aligned with his own teaching philosophy, one that recognizes the great potential young children have to learn. Mr. Kaponyas' goal as a BASIS Independent educator is to inspire his students to learn, grow, and excel! He believes his students are the future leaders and innovators that will help our society become a kinder and more eco-friendly generation. He models how to be eco-friendly to his class of 1st graders every day.

When Mr. Kaponyas is not in the classroom, he enjoys spending time outside with his dog Peanut Butter, surfing, relaxing outside, or going for long bike rides through Prospect Park.

#### **What GOING GREEN means to Mr. Kaponyas:**

A better and brighter future. It means taking care of our planet and of each other.





**Ms. Kertis**  
**Writing Teaching Fellow**

In 2007, Ms. Kertis received a Bachelor of Arts from Bard College with a major in American literature and a minor in fiction writing. In 2010, she earned an M.F.A. in fiction writing at Sarah Lawrence College.

Ms. Kertis joins BASIS Independent Brooklyn's English faculty as a Teaching Fellow focused on writing in grades 5–11 English classes. Her interest in **sustainable agriculture** started in high school. During summer vacation, she worked on one of the country's oldest Community Supported Agriculture farms in Amagansett, New York; during the school year, she worked at two different organic farms in Western Massachusetts. In 2006, she studied abroad for a semester in South America and spent the following summer working alongside traditional homesteaders to maintain an indigenous medicinal plant garden in Peru. After graduating from college in 2007, her enthusiasm for sustainable food and agriculture brought her to Hawaii, where she worked on an organic coffee farm and helped to open a farm-to-table restaurant. In 2008, she moved to the Pacific Northwest, where she worked for a Community Supported Agriculture farm (one of the country's largest) and a vegan restaurant. Now, with the help of her husband and two young kids, she maintains a small garden behind her apartment—this year, they're growing strawberries, champagne raspberries, cooking herbs, and flowers.

**What GOING GREEN means to Ms. Kertis:**

To me, "going green" is about spending time in beautiful outdoor spaces as often as possible. Hiking, gardening, and picnicking with my family reminds us that our environment is important, which naturally motivates us to care for it.



**Mr. Strom**  
**Subject Expert Teacher, Biology & Physics**

Mr. Strom studied Biology at Georgetown University, where he received a Bachelor of Science in 2010. In 2017, he graduated from Rutgers University with a Master of Science in Ecology.

Mr. Strom is a Subject Expert Teacher in Biology and Physics and is fascinated by evolution and the diversity of life on Earth. His particular fondness for insects and plants began while he was an undergraduate at Georgetown, where he studied the coevolutionary relationship between aphids and cottonwood trees.

Later, at Rutgers, he studied the defenses of blueberry bushes. He worked closely with farmers to test whether breeding blueberries for things like size and flavor has inadvertently altered their ability to produce chemicals that repel insect herbivores. This kind of work helps improve organic pest control methods, reducing our reliance on harmful pesticides.

These days, Mr. Strom gets to share his love of evolution with BASIS Independent Brooklyn students all the time. He uses his blueberry work to show how scientists can work with the laws of nature instead of against them, producing solutions in agriculture, medicine, and industry that don't strain the planet or lead to unintended consequences in the future.

**What GOING GREEN means to Mr. Strom:**

Going green means realizing that we only have one Earth to live on and we need to treat it like the gift it is. It means treating the Earth like we would our house, cleaning up after ourselves and keeping the resources we use to a minimum. I love to teach about the long list of weird and wonderful organisms that share our home, but I know how easily that list can shorten when humans are careless. We have the power to trash the planet, but we also have the power to be its protectors if we make that choice.



**Ms. Thorne**  
**Subject Expert Teacher, General Science & Biology**

Ms. Thorne attended The City College of New York with a full scholarship from the Teacher Academy, a program that offered weekly first-hand experiences in New York City classrooms. She received two additional scholarships for academic achievement before graduating magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology and Secondary Education. Ms. Thorne then continued her education at Brooklyn College where she obtained a Master of Arts degree in Secondary Education and also graduated with honors.

During her undergraduate education, Ms. Thorne had the privilege to work on a curriculum development team that focused on making real-world scientific data more accessible to students. The project, called Ecology Disrupted, used scientific data to highlight human impact on various ecosystems, a subject which Ms. Thorne feels very strongly about.

In 2014, Ms. Thorne brought her passion for ecology to BASIS Independent Brooklyn where she currently teaches science and biology. She continues to educate students about various ecosystems and how human activity alters them. One of Ms. Thorne's favorite units in the science curriculum is the Plant Unit, during which Ms. Thorne enjoys taking students outside to learn more about the street trees that grow in New York City, specifically their own neighborhoods. She has also engaged students in engineering their own water filters and collaborative projects with ConEdison designed to bring water saving and energy efficient upgrades to NYC homes.

**What GOING GREEN means to Ms. Thorne:**

Going green means spreading knowledge of human impacts on ecosystems while inspiring respect and love for our environment and all of the organisms our planet is home to.