

STEM Career Interviews

School Leadership in Urban Runoff Reduction Project

"As a young man with so many possibilities that your life could take on it is so hard to know what you want. And the fear of failure was hard for me to articulate, but it haunted me in my 20s."

-Nick Iannacone



Introducing...

Nick Iannacone

Scheduling and Marketing Coordinator, Shipboard, Living Classrooms Foundation

Meet Nicholas, best known as Nick Iannacone. Nick was born in Santa Fe, New Mexico, raised in New Jersey, and currently lives in Baltimore, Maryland with his wife and 16 month old daughter. Nick is the Scheduling and Marketing Coordinator for the Shipboard Department at the Living Classrooms Foundation.

In Nick's position, he is responsible for booking the maritime voyages on the three traditional vessels: Lady Maryland, Sigsbee, and Mildred Belle. Nick works with teachers from Baltimore City, Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania and Washington, DC to arrange field trips where their students get to learn about the Chesapeake Bay, environmental science and experience their local history through hand-on immersive learning.

Nick and his family moved back to New Jersey when his parents got a divorce. Nick's brother lived with him and his mom in her home town in south Jersey while he was in elementary and middle school. "We lived in a very small town. My K-8 school had only 98 students when I graduated 8th grade. It was very difficult growing up in a small insulated town since there were very few people to be friends with, but since it was a town along the Jersey shore we had many opportunities to go to the beach and explore the salt marshes behind the house that we lived in. While living at the shore I learned to swim, to sail, and to love the ocean and the critters that could be found at low tide in the marshes."

Nick moved to his Dad's house for high school and enrolled in an engineering program in a regional high school right outside New York City. "It was a huge culture shock to be in a largely diverse area and attend a high school with over 4,000 students. I joined the Cross Country and Track teams and was a pretty good runner for all four years of high school. I discovered a love for science; especially biology, physics, and horticulture."

After graduating high school Nick got a full scholarship to study at the University of Rhode Island (URI). He wanted to go there to study marine biology, but changed majors to study the social science of how people interact with the marine environment. His program was called "Marine Affairs and Coastal Studies". This unique major pulled together concepts from economics, environmental science, social and cultural anthropology and maritime history.

While in college, he perfected his sailing abilities to later become a sailing instructor in the summer seasons. Nick taught sailing every summer and eventually took a student job teaching the sailing classes that the University offered in the spring and the fall. Upon graduating, Nick claims he had no idea on what he should do next.

"I had never really planned my life out past the age of 22. My number one goal was to graduate college and get a degree, and then I did, and wasn't sure what to do next. Most of my friends had secured internships or were going right into graduate school. I thought I would teach sailing classes at URI in the summer and get some new direction in the fall... My life changed because I discovered that I loved teaching sailing and also really enjoyed working with kids and young adults. I knew that I did not want to go to grad school or pursue a life in academia."

By September, Nick decided to earn his captain's license and left the sailing center to accept a job on a traditional sail boat that took people out on cruises around Narragansett Bay. The following winter, Nick took a "Captain's class" and passed the US Coast Guard Exam. He earned his captain's license by July of the following year. Nick worked on large sailing boats taking tourists out to see the sights and trained to be the captain, but he missed teaching and working with kids. This led to Spring of 2013, when Nick began working for Living Classrooms as the mate on the Lady Maryland.

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“It was a perfect fit! I got to sail, work with kids, and teach them about both the marine environment and their local history. I was the mate of Lady Maryland for 2 years and then was given the opportunity to be the captain of the Sigsbee. I was the Sigsbee Captain for 4 years and loved it very much. I got to work outside, drive a boat, work with kids, and teach crew members how to sail. We did environmental science, took kids camping, taught students about their local history and tried to show why the marine environment mattered in their daily lives.”

6 years later, Nick and his wife had a baby. Nick moved into the office so that he could travel less and focus some more energy at home. With new responsibilities, posed new challenges for Nick as he explains, “I was also ready for a new challenge and the position doing the scheduling and marketing for the Shipboard Department was perfect. At the time, I had very little experience with client communication, managing revenue, or conducting marketing and outreach. I spent all of 2019 learning, growing, and gaining confidence in my new position. It was refreshing to have new skills to learn after almost 10 years of sailing and teaching.”

Nick's current position has many parts, but they can roughly be broken down into three categories: contacting teachers to plan and schedule their trips on the boats, supporting the daily operations on the boats, and helping to manage grant supported programs like the Fort McHenry Paddle project and the Star Spangled Banner Trail Stewards program.

A typical day for Nick could be in the office at the computer, answering emails, designing marketing materials, or managing the finances for the three boats; however, Nick could also be found outside filling in as an educator or captain on any one of the three boats. You might also catch Nick at Fort McHenry helping students learn how to kayak, learn about the salt marsh, and learn about the history of the War of 1812.

“I work at Living Classrooms because I believe in the mission. I want to make Baltimore a healthier, safer, and better place for everyone to live. In particular, I want to connect students with the marine environment, their local history, and the threads of global commerce that run through their city. I want to get students out of the classroom and help them to understand the world around them. I believe in hands-on learning. I believe that science is cool and that it is for everyone. I want to work at Living Classrooms because I feel the need to use my advantages to help and inspire others.”

Nick admits to struggling to find direction, especially after graduating college. “As a young man with so many possibilities that your life could take on it is so hard to know what you want. And the fear of failure was hard for me to articulate, but it haunted me in my 20s. It was hard for me to have self-confidence in my 20s because it seemed like other people were always outpacing my efforts... I still struggle with work-life balance. It is hard to make a difference at work while being focused on my family. It is even harder to give myself the time and attention I need. I need to work on slowing down and listening to myself. I need to give myself permission to take a moment for self-care and mindfulness.”

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Nick describes one of his biggest rewards given by a decade of working with kids is the pleasure of knowing that a small field trip in 4th or 5th grade can have a lasting impact on their lives. He goes on to state that many of whom he has met in environmental fields, have participated in Living Classrooms programs as students. They always cite how the program changed their life and encouraged them to care more deeply for our community and for the environment.

Nick prides himself in his learning and who he is today. He is rewarded during these unprecedented times by adapting to the world's climate and by releasing some control over the future, to make the best of where he is today. Nick finds himself grateful and thankful to be welcomed in the Baltimore community.

"I felt welcomed when I moved to Baltimore. I feel like the Living Classrooms community cares about me. I have a nice place to live, I have kind and respectful teachers who now care for my daughter while I am at work, and I get to earn a living while doing things every day that carry meaning."

Nick's primary personal goals are to be the best Father/ Husband that he can be, which also requires him taking more time for himself, catering to his personal interests and needs to keep him healthy physically and mentally.

"I was lucky to have a good family with kind and loving parents who took an active interest in me and my brother. I want to pay that forward while I raise my children and support my wife... I have started running again for the first time since high school. I want to eat right and take the time to enjoy meals. I need to take more intentional pauses throughout the day to be kind to my mental health."

Nick continues to expand his knowledge so that he can create meaningful digital content in this new post-COVID landscape. He hasn't been most comfortable with technology and software but takes an optimistic view as he wants to learn how to use those tools more effectively. He also admits that he does not understand the full power of social media, but he wants to learn how to use social media for good.

Aside from parents, the most influential people in Nick's life have been teachers and coaches. Recognizing the immense value of teachers and the hard work that they do, Nick wanted to share a final saying that "shows the true gift a teacher gives to their students". Nick believes that "it is not an understanding of the concept, math or literature or science, but a love of learning" that holds true value. He continues his perspective by giving his experience, "I learned math and Spanish and science in school, but what I really learned was how to think and approach problems. My best teachers gave me a love of learning."

Nick leaves us with multiple words of wisdom throughout his video, but leaves us with a quote to ponder, "If you want to build a ship, don't herd people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea" -Antoine de Saint-Exupery"