

# ANNUAL REPORT 2013-2014



Connect • Collaborate • Learn

Formerly known as  
Educators for Social Responsibility

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# Mission Statement

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Engaging Schools collaborates with educators to create school communities where each and every student develops the skills and mindsets needed to succeed and make positive contributions in school, work, and life.

## What we do

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We provide professional learning and publications for classroom management, schoolwide discipline and student support, instructional practice, postsecondary readiness, and advisory programs – all grounded in the values of equity, community, and democracy. We partner with schools and districts to meet their specific needs. Our team of highly qualified program staff across the country provides on-site training, mentoring, and consultation. We also conduct open-enrollment institutes where teachers from many different schools come together to learn new practices and strategies, and we publish and disseminate educational resources that help educators turn theory into action.

Through our three core programs, teachers use research-based teaching strategies and classroom practices to build a classroom environment in which students feel safe, engaged and challenged (Engaged Classrooms); schools develop a restorative approach to discipline (Schoolwide Discipline and Student Support); and students feel a sense of belonging and gain academic and behavioral support from trusted adults (Advisory Plus.)

## Our impact

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After implementing our programs and using our resources, schools and teachers report:

- a more positive and welcoming climate and culture
- increases in student social and self-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making
- improved attendance and course completion rates
- lower rates of course failures, dropouts, absenteeism, disciplinary referrals, and suspensions



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**Educators for Social Responsibility**

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# Message From the Executive Director

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Dear Friend,

I'm sure you know that like people, organizations evolve and change. This past year, we changed our name to better reflect our current work. We're now Engaging Schools, with the same lasting commitment to the values of equity, democracy, and community. Our new tagline, "connect, collaborate, learn," summarizes our beliefs.

In order to succeed in school and in life, young people need to feel connected to other students and to adults. They need to feel like they belong. Close, supportive relationships marked by meaningful connections between and among educators and students are hallmarks of an engaging school.

I was heartened by the results of a recent education poll of the Massachusetts general public. The poll found that support for teaching collaboration skills almost equals support for teaching traditional subject matter. To be an engaged citizen in our pluralistic democracy, young people need to be able to collaborate. This includes learning and practicing how to work cooperatively with others, value differences, communicate effectively, solve problems, and manage conflicts.

Ultimately, the purpose of education is to learn, and Engaging Schools knows that this happens best when schools make the critical connections between the cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions of learning and development. Engaging classrooms and school communities address these connections so learning can take place. Each and every student develops the skills, habits of learning, and mindsets needed to succeed and make positive contributions in school, work, and life.

"Connect, collaborate, learn" is also a powerful message for the adult community in schools. Connect with young people, their families, and one another. Collaborate to continuously strengthen the school community.

Become a learning community that uses data, new knowledge, and new practices to serve and support all students.

In addition, "connect, collaborate, learn" speaks to how Engaging Schools' staff members work with educators. When we partner with a school or district, we begin by making connections and building trusting relationships. We collaborate to create change, rather than imposing a "right answer." Together, we learn how to increase learning and foster caring among all students.

Last year, Engaging Schools provided training, coaching, and consultation for staff in over 100 schools, reached another 100 schools through the leadership development we do with aspiring principals, and put 8,000 resources into the hands of educators. We made a positive difference in the lives of many hundreds of thousands of students. I am deeply grateful for your support and that of many others who share our values and beliefs about how to engage, educate, and support our nation's young people.

Thank you!



Larry Dieringer



# Program Highlights

## SEL from K through 12 in Anchorage, AK

The Anchorage School District is a long-time partner of Engaging Schools, having begun implementation of our Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) in 1989. Over the years, the district has ordered many hundreds of copies of our RCCP



curriculum, *Connected and Respected*, for its elementary school staff as they continue to integrate social and emotional development and skills with academics. The district now serves almost 48,000 students in more than 100 schools and programs

Last summer, Engaging Schools expanded its involvement in Anchorage by beginning to work with its middle and high schools. We delivered a four-day institute for teams from across the district to introduce our Engaged Classrooms approach. Through participation in the institute, and subsequent coaching and mentoring, teachers learned to improve their classroom management skills and to support students' improved social and self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

*"We know that when students are engaged they are connected to their learning. Wonderful things happen when they are drawn in by quality instruction and provided interesting hands-on activities."*

*- Superintendent Ed Graff,  
Anchorage School District*

Teachers also learned how to engage all their students in academic work by using critical core practices such as responsive conferencing, group learning, effective teacher talk, habits of learning, and universal expectations.

Teachers learned techniques from *Activators: Classroom Strategies for Engaging Middle and High School Students* to increase students' attention and interest and to maximize their class participation. The book was so well received at the institute that the district later ordered 600 additional copies to distribute to all middle and high schools in the district.

## Laying the Foundation for Advocacy

The expertise of Engaging Schools staff is often tapped to advance reforms in education. Last year we authored a strategy document at the request of the Schott Foundation for Public Education and the Nellie Mae Education Foundation. Engaging Schools' Carol Miller Lieber wrote "Conditions and Considerations for Effective Development and Implementation of Personal Opportunity Plans," which both foundations distributed widely to advocate for these plans in Massachusetts. Carol makes the case for middle and high schools to support each of their students through the creation of individualized plans that help them choose and prepare for personally meaningful opportunities after high school.



# Program Highlights

## Increasing Engagement

Last year, leaders of IS27, a large middle school on Staten Island, wanted to increase student engagement in classrooms to improve student behavior and raise student achievement. They turned to Engaging Schools for help. After just two meetings with our coach Mary (MJ) Austin, the feedback from teachers and administrators was so positive that the school decided to add more sessions with MJ.

“We’ve seen an overall improvement in the culture of our school,” Principal Andrea O’Donnell says. And the NYC DOE seems to agree: the school recently improved to “proficient” in a quality review of the school’s culture of learning, which Andrea credits to their partnership with Engaging Schools.

Meanwhile, school leaders read three of Engaging Schools’ secondary resources: *Making Learning REAL*, *Getting Classroom Management Right*, and *Activators*, and were so impressed that they ordered copies for every teacher.

The school asked Donna Mehle, co-author of *Activators*, to lead a workshop based on the book. “Teachers raved about the experience,” said Principal Andrea O’Donnell. “Those who weren’t in the workshop asked us to get Donna back for another so they could participate.” Teachers are now using activators (short activities used at any time during a lesson) to increase classroom engagement and participation.) Andrea reports that one teacher said, “I didn’t think the activator Donna suggested would work, but I tried it anyway. I couldn’t believe how engaged the kids were. I suggested that all my colleagues use them.”



Andrea says, “We’re now seeing strategies and routines used everywhere, in classrooms and beyond. The students experience consistency throughout the school.” An example is a sign on classroom walls that reads “Three Before Me,” reminding students that when they have a question, they are expected to try to answer it themselves using three different sources or methods before asking the teacher. This practice encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning.

## Teaching Tolerance Promotes Restorative Justice

The summer 2014 issue of *Teaching Tolerance*, the widely distributed magazine of the Southern Poverty Law Center, included an article that featured Engaging Schools’ work at the Bronx Design and Construction Academy in New York City. The article described the school’s success in using policies rooted in restorative justice rather than harsh, punitive discipline, and shared practical tips on how teachers can engage in restorative inquiry, a technique that allows teachers to first understand students’ experiences, then guide them to repair harm and restore their good standing.

# Program Highlights

## Diagnosing Problems to Help Find Solutions

One of the reasons so many schools seek our support is the value we place on working collaboratively to create school communities that work for all students. Key to this process is helping schools take an objective and critical look at how they do things – from classroom management to schoolwide discipline to how teachers teach.

Engaging Schools implements a unique diagnostic process created by us and led by Director of Professional Services Michele Tissiere. Our team members carry out “sensing interviews,” which are written and oral interactions that develop a sense of a school’s strengths and growth opportunities from the perspective of many different community members, including a representative sample of school leaders, faculty and staff members, and students. Professional Services staff carefully observe classrooms and public spaces, and examine disciplinary data, as well as student support and teaching practices. All of this information is analyzed and compiled into a comprehensive report with recommendations.

“All parts of the process allow us to craft a narrative about the school,” says Michele. “We don’t come in to judge but to understand. We aim to build relational trust within the community and with us.” Strengths and opportunities for improvement are highlighted and aligned with recommendations for next steps, with a goal of creating a sustainable plan for improvement.

Because the diagnostic process includes an objective analysis of practices and representative voices from everyone in the school, it sends the message that equity is an essential element for future change. “The feedback we get from participants evokes our ‘connect, collaborate, learn’ tagline. We have the capacity to listen very deeply, to stay silent, to ask critical questions, and to honor a school’s story,” Michele says.



## Students’ Voices Heard through Advisory

When Sue Ambrozavitch took on leadership of a high school in Danvers, MA, she recalled that “students were almost an afterthought.” One of her top goals as principal was to start an advisory program to create a more student-centered climate. “Students needed a voice, and they needed more informal relationships with adults who could shepherd them through their high school experience.”

Sue invited Engaging Schools in as a partner after researching what we do. She was impressed with our longstanding and deep involvement across the country helping schools set up effective advisory programs.

The school phased in the program, growing it by one grade per year, and developed themes to address the evolving needs of students as they

progress through the grades. For example, ninth graders focus on acclimating to high school and knowing themselves as students, and participate in an anti-bullying curriculum. Seniors identify, prepare for, and participate in a six-week internship outside of school.

Sue told us this past year that “Students are appreciative, and Danvers High has a more collegial community of students and adults. Recently when the school faced a major crisis, advisory provided a forum for support, helping students and staff regroup at a difficult time.”

# A Groundbreaking Code for Discipline and Student Support

Engaging Schools has been collaborating with the Syracuse City School District (SCSD) all year in a dramatic overhaul of its discipline and student support policies and practices. In 2013, Syracuse suspended students at a higher rate than almost every other district in the country, affecting a disproportionate number of students of color and students receiving special education services. When the Attorney General of NY State investigated these concerns, Engaging Schools responded to the district's urgent need for a partner to help them institute major changes.

Over the course of seven months, Engaging Schools' Carol Miller Lieber facilitated a 50-member community group and closely collaborated with SCSD Executive Director of Student Support Services Patricia Clark to develop a new code of conduct aimed at promoting more restorative, supportive, and equitable disciplinary measures. The Syracuse Code of Conduct, Character, and Support was accepted by the Attorney General's office and then approved unanimously by the Syracuse School Board in September 2014.

The Code provides guidelines that will support the district as it makes several significant shifts, including:

- The statement of a firmly held belief that all young people are capable of achieving their personal best and, when necessary, improving their behavior with guidance, instruction, support, and coaching;
- The extensive use of restorative practices that help young people learn pro-social behaviors, accept responsibility for their actions, work to repair relationships, and restore their good standing in the community;
- The use of in-school and out-of-school suspensions only for the most serious anti-social behaviors
- And a focus on maximizing opportunities for success for each and every student.

Given the ground-breaking nature of the Syracuse Code of Conduct, Character, and Support, we



are working to make it a model for other districts across the country.

Reflecting on the process, Patricia Clark notes, "Our new Code of Conduct, Character, and Support has changed the whole life of the district. It is a cutting-edge document that will enable us to do

*continued on page 6*

## Coming soon: a Schoolwide Discipline and Student Support Field Guide

Under development is a Schoolwide Discipline Field Guide, a how-to that will help district leaders, administrators, student support staff, and teachers develop their capacities to carry out alternative, positive approaches to discipline. This guide is funded by The California Endowment, The Atlantic Philanthropies, and the Lippincott Foundation. We are piloting it in every school where we provide Schoolwide Discipline and Student Support services, and publication is scheduled for the summer of 2015.

# A Groundbreaking Code for Discipline and Student Support

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the right thing for our community and our kids. It is a far-reaching document that supports a restorative approach and emphasizes interventions to help students become more successful.”

As Syracuse puts the Code into practice, we are providing staff training that includes not only

all leaders and educators but also bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and safety personnel. In addition, Engaging Schools is continuing its work with staffs in three schools to maximize their capacity to strengthen students’ self-discipline, habits of learning, problem-solving skills, and investment in school and learning.

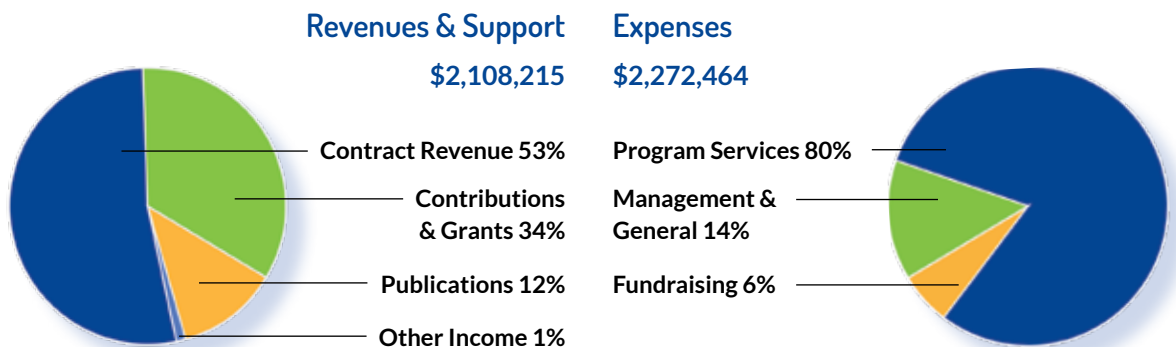
Several shifts are already evident. Patricia comments, “We have reorganized student support services in ways that are more responsive to the needs of a range of students, and we are establishing more standardized practices across schools.” The current school year has seen fewer out-of-school suspensions and a dramatic increase in facilitated conferences between students and teachers. “We have a long way to go,” says Patricia, “but we’re on the right road.”

*“What’s the impact of the Code of Conduct? At a Parent Council meeting, a parent shared a story about her son’s friend, who a year ago was unhappy, in trouble all the time, and with few friends. At the beginning of the school year, he was assigned a student support coach, and it has made all the difference. He’s having a good year and knows now that he has someone he can check in with.”*

– Executive Director of Student Support Services  
Patricia Clark

## Financial Summary

July 2013 – June 2014



Net Assets	6/30/14	6/30/13
Unrestricted	\$ 1,305,602	\$ 1,469,851
Temporarily Restricted	574,050	336,010
<b>Net Assets at End of Year</b>	<b>\$ 1,879,652</b>	<b>\$ 1,805,861</b>

These figures are derived from Engaging Schools’ audited statements, full copies of which are available upon request.



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