

# ANNUAL REPORT 2017-2018



Connect • Collaborate • Learn

*Formerly known as  
Educators for Social Responsibility*

# Mission Statement

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.

## Building Positive Classroom Cultures in Oakland

Engaging Schools is supporting the efforts of the Oakland (CA) Unified School District to implement social and emotional learning (SEL), create positive school cultures and climates, and improve student outcomes for the district's 37,000 students. With a four-year graduation rate of 70 percent and a dropout rate of 20 percent, this district faces many challenges.

Working alongside a dedicated group of district leaders, this past year we focused on helping 40 of the district's instructional coaches gain skills and competencies to better support the teachers in their schools. We provided a four-day institute that was met with much enthusiasm from the district leaders and the participants. Topics included the role of coach as a "mediator of teacher thinking" and approaches to personalization that support the development of relational trust

between teachers and students. When we work with instructional coaches, we have a broader impact by building the capacity of leaders within schools to help their teachers learn how to engage all of their students and create positive classroom cultures.



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# Message From the Executive Director

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Dear Friend,

Engaging Schools continues to support school districts across the country to reduce the use, overuse, and disproportional use of punishment and exclusion, and maximize supports and opportunities for all students. As part of this work, we are partnering with a growing number of school districts to revise (or create) their codes of conduct, which we have expanded to be called codes of character, conduct, and support.

Revising a code is a key step in shifting to a more restorative, equitable, and accountable approach to schoolwide discipline. A code of character, conduct, and support articulates a vision, provides a framework, and serves as a catalyst for change in a school district. In the Syracuse City School District (SCSD), where we collaborated on the development of a new code in 2014, and on implementation of that code since then, the change in policies and practices has resulted in a significant decrease in suspension rates and referrals out of classrooms. In most districts, various subgroups, especially African-American students and special education students, are disciplined at much higher rates than their peers. SCSD has succeeded in significantly reducing this disproportional discipline.

A good code helps to achieve equity. It aims to ensure the rights and access of all students to an education in a safe, civil, caring, and supportive learning environment. It guides schools to help young people develop the social, emotional, and academic competencies they need to succeed. This kind of code addresses character development, recognizing that character shapes conduct, and fosters good citizenship. It aims to help adults and young people understand how schools are public places that have cultural norms and must balance individual rights with the civic responsibilities that make it possible to live in a free, open, and democratic society.

Codes articulate core beliefs that serve as touchstones for schools and individual staff members, especially when supporting students to re-think and change behavior is frustrating and challenging. Two beliefs that we find particularly important to build collective commitment around are: 1) All students are capable of achieving their personal best, and when necessary improving their behavior with guidance, instruction, support, and coaching; and 2) Different students need different kinds and amounts of time, attention, instruction, and support to behave responsibly and succeed academically.

Last year Engaging Schools collaborated with more than 50 schools, supported district-level work to impact over 150 additional schools, sent our high-quality publications to 5,300 educators, and reached nearly 2,500 people with our SEL white paper. What follows in this report are some highlights from the year.

We deeply appreciate the dedication and sustained effort of all those we partner with—school and district staff and families—to help young people develop the skills and competencies to succeed and contribute in school, work, and life. And we are grateful to the many individuals and foundations that make this work possible.

Thank you!



# Engaging Staff and Students in a Large High School

New Britain (CT) High School (NBHS) is a comprehensive high school that serves a student body with complex needs: 75 percent of its 2,200 students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 18 percent are English Language Learners, and 18 percent are students with disabilities. Though there have been improvements in recent years, the four-year graduation rate is 76 percent (far lower for certain groups), and more than one-third of the student body is chronically absent.



tive working groups to plan the changes they wanted to implement first and how to secure the buy-in of the entire staff. They included what they call “The Big Four” changes related to school-wide discipline: 1) new goals and practices for their in-school suspension room, 2) management of morning entry and afternoon exit, 3) implementation of scans in hallways during class, and 4) adult involvement to ensure smooth transitions between classes. The groups also decided to focus professional learning on a set of

Engaging Schools began working with the school in the fall of 2017. We surveyed leaders and staff on school culture and climate and on instructional practices, making sure to gather multiple perspectives and concerns. We studied data

strategies and practices to create engaged classrooms.

At the start of the 2018-19 school year, the entire staff gathered to learn about and reflect on the planned changes and begin the year’s process of professional learning to build their commitment and skill set. Engaging Schools co-led several sessions with NBHS leaders to provide orientation to The Big Four and facilitate professional learning on concrete practices for personalization and student engagement.



on attendance, suspensions, expulsions, and graduation rates, and disaggregated it so that the variances among different groups of students were transparent.

Guided by the goal of creating a school culture and climate where all students, families, and staff feel welcome, safe, cared for, and engaged, Engaging Schools then worked to support the creation of effec-

Here is one of the comments we received from an NBHS teacher:

*“I wanted to thank you for the days of training. You provided us with some great information and tools to use. This is my 29th year and I believe that this year has started off with the best planning and prep, bar none. Your energy and enthusiasm are contagious!”*

Engaging Schools will continue supporting New Britain High School throughout the 2018-2019 school year to help bring about changes in school culture and climate, and in teaching and learning, to improve outcomes for all of the school’s students.

# Creating a Restorative Culture

Engaging Schools has completed its second year providing support for a Restorative Practices Team made up of teacher-leaders at Fuller Middle School in Framingham (MA) as they work to create a restorative culture throughout the school. The project is a unique collaboration between the school, the local teachers' union, the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA), and Engaging Schools, all funded by a grant from the National Education Association. Ultimately the MTA would like to help spread the model to other districts to embed restorative discipline practices in their schools.

One strategy now in widespread use is the practice of restorative circles, a structured response to student behavior challenges and conflict. A circle can take place during or after school, and can include students (even an entire class), staff, and sometimes parents.



## Participating adults have commented:

*"I recently facilitated a restorative circle in response to student conflict and it went great. It took ten minutes and restored the teacher-student relationship that could have been seriously damaged. This student was known to close up and not respond when frustrated, yet he shared his feelings about the interaction and was able to work with the classroom teacher and come up with a solution."*

– Grade 7 special education teacher

*"The language of student and adults is all about restorative practices now. More and more, kids and adults are requesting circles as a way to solve problems."*

– Student Support Team member

In the spring of 2018, Fuller staff expressed a desire for more strategies and interventions. Engaging Schools helped the team recognize that a newly-formed student leadership group, called Ambassadors, could be tapped as peer mediators. Engaging Schools brought its expertise to bear in three training sessions with 16 sixth and seventh graders. This year, the mediators are back at school serving in their new roles with seriousness and growing competence.

Dan Callahan of the MTA observed the Ambassadors' training in June and commented:

*"The kids used role plays to demonstrate their skills for us after their third training session. One boy did a better job than the adults. His delivery was so natural. A 13-year-old girl said 'I'm looking forward to next year so I can help people!'"*

Student Success Coach Brendan Keenan said,

*"The peer mediation training made a big impact and we were very impressed with our students' insight and engagement."*

# Codes of Character, Conduct, and Support

Engaging Schools is assisting multiple school districts as they revise and implement their codes of character, conduct, and support. (Please see Larry Dieringer’s letter on p.1.) Among our partner districts, Wheatland-Chili Central School District, outside Rochester (NY), completed its code revision in the spring and launched the new code at the beginning of the school year. We began guiding recalibration of codes in Orange County (NC), Guilford County (NC), and Pittsfield (MA) last spring, and plan to facilitate a process in New Britain (CT) starting later this year. Each district’s needs and context are unique. Here is one example.

Deborah Leh, superintendent of Wheatland-Chili, describes her district’s movement toward a new code. “Two years ago, we saw behavioral and mental health needs in some of our students, particularly with a group of elementary students. The children’s challenging behavior was not changing, and their teachers and parents were frustrated. We dug in at that point to find a solution.” The district performed a qualitative study and based on its findings developed a three-year action plan

*“The start of school this year felt totally different from other years,” said Leh recently. “We’re focusing on what we want our students to do, not what we don’t want them to do.”*

—Deborah Leh, Superintendent,  
Wheatland-Chili Central School District

that included a move away from a punitive orientation toward social and emotional competency development.

That same year, Superintendent Leh attended a panel discussion sponsored by the New York State School Boards Association where Engaging Schools described the success of the code revision process in Syracuse (NY). She realized that her district’s code must also change to serve as the guide to the new culture in the schools. She asked Engaging Schools to play a key role in the rewriting, with social and emotional learning and promotion practices at its core. We helped her organize and lead a 25-member group that included parents, teachers, community members, and school and district leaders to accomplish the revision.

The revised code was approved by the school board in the spring of 2018. During the summer, the district sent copies to every family, and with our help, a team created student mini-lessons about elements of the code. Engaging Schools presented the code to the entire staff – administrators, teachers, aides, cafeteria and office staff, custodians, and bus drivers – in workshops before school opened. The code includes a “toolbox” of teaching strategies staff can use immediately to put the new code in effect every day throughout the district. Engag-



# — One District’s Journey

ing Schools will continue to assist as the code becomes the North Star of Wheatland-Chili’s increasingly restorative, equitable, and accountable culture.

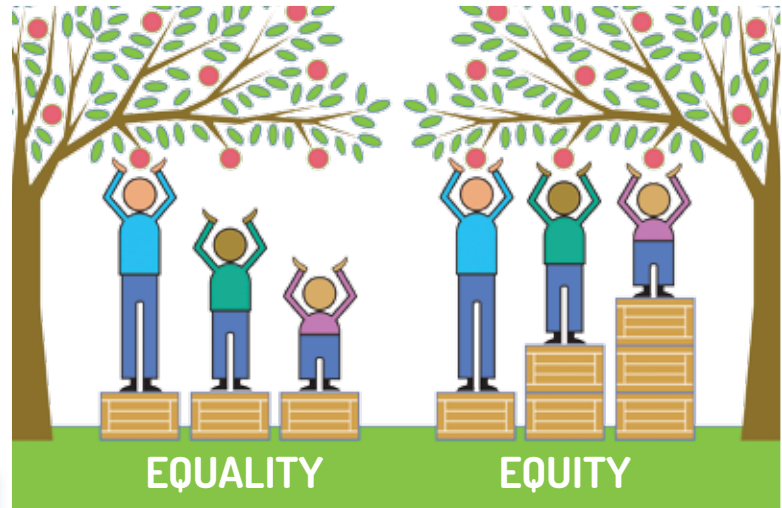
Leh says of the district’s journey, “Our concern with a particular group of young children led to a shift toward a culture of promotion and prevention in our entire district. It was a turning point for our district.”

*“Our orientation is toward promotion of positive social behaviors and prevention of discipline problems.”*

## The five rules

The district team prepared for the new school year by summarizing the full, aligned set of infractions and consequences contained in the code into five simply worded, positively stated rules that apply to all age levels. Each is aligned to desired student behaviors and supporting interventions and consequences. These rules cover 90 percent of the student behavior challenges that most adults confront in schools:

- Arrive to class on time.
- Stay in class and have a pass to travel in public spaces.
- Be safe and respect others’ personal dignity and space. (Keep hands and feet to self.)
- Listen, acknowledge, and respond to directives and requests.
- Use appropriate and respectful language with peers and adults.



Equity and equality are not the same things. The Wheatland-Chili code, and all codes of character, conduct, and support, acknowledge that schools need to consider students’ age, developmental status, and individual needs when making support and intervention decisions. Well-delivered behavior interventions and supports are standardized, predictable, clear, fair, and timely—and not necessarily identical.

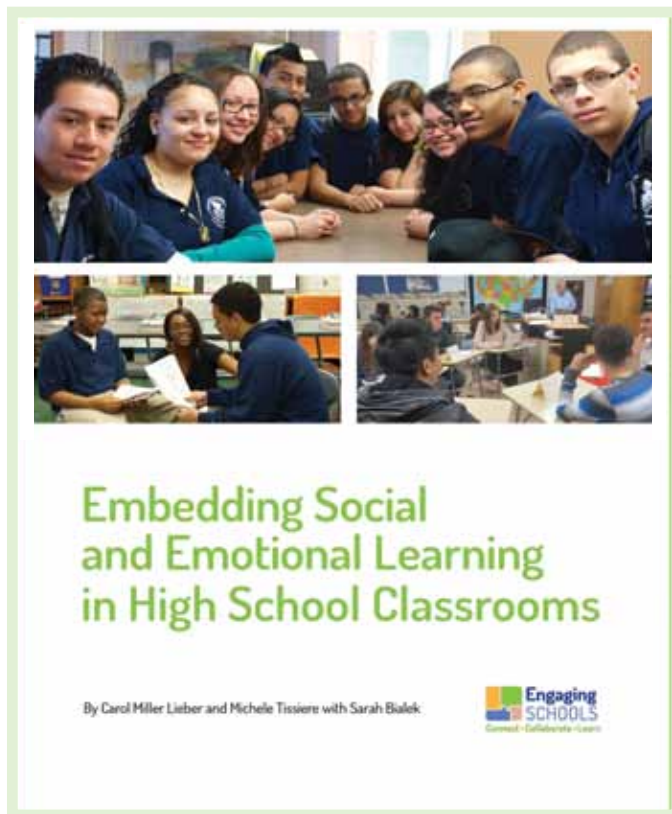


# Advancing the Field of Social and Emotional Learning

*“The timing couldn’t be better for a thought-provoking white paper that spells out what should be the foundation for implementing SEL in high schools and offers a framework for reaching all students, every day, all the time. Embedding Social and Emotional Learning in High School Classrooms provides valuable insights into how to do SEL in high schools and makes a crucial contribution to advancing the field.”*

– Jennifer Buffett, Co-President, NoVo Foundation

The white paper we released in late 2017, *Embedding Social and Emotional Learning in High School Classrooms*, has found its way into the hands of thousands of educational leaders and advocates. Its goals are to influence school and district leaders by building a case for embedding SEL instruction into every classroom as foundational to



implementing SEL in high schools and show how it can be done. Drawing on Engaging Schools’ 20-plus years of developing and supporting this work in secondary schools, and the latest research on student learning, the paper outlines a framework of four core skill sets—self-awareness, self-management, social efficacy, and academic efficacy. It also identifies a concrete list of student competencies and desired target behaviors, which we call Learning and Life Competencies (LLCs), that are critical to foster in young people.

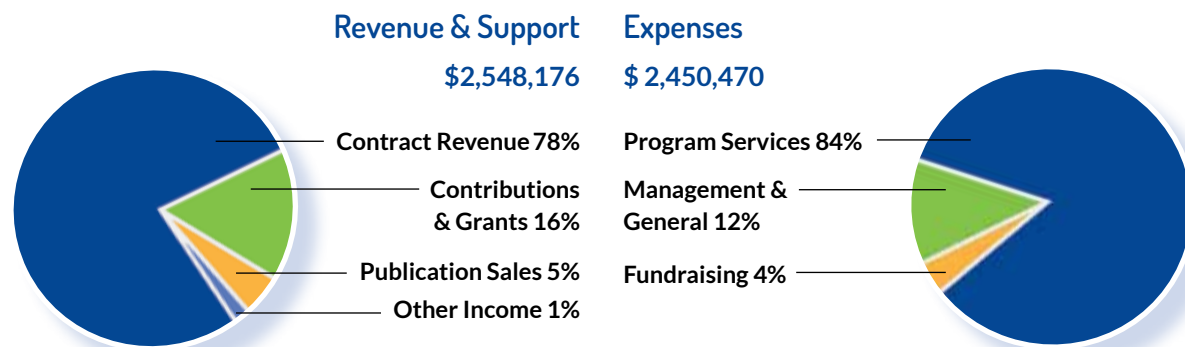
The paper is also proving to be a valuable tool during our workshops, institutes, and trainings:

- Engaging Schools Executive Director Larry Dieringer delivered two workshops on embedding SEL in secondary schools at a national conference in Boston to standing-room-only audiences, distributing more than 300 copies of the paper that day.
- Program Director Michele Tisiere used sections of the paper to reinforce critical concepts at a St. Louis workshop for district leaders and provided strategies for integrating SEL into academics. The 19 districts participating in this workshop collectively serve more than one million students and are leading the country in making SEL a part of the fabric of their schools. Participants made comments such as “Michele Tisiere was excellent; she provided high-quality tools that we can use” and “Michele very effectively demonstrated how to facilitate adult SEL.”
- Working with Engaging Schools’ Carol Miller Lieber, an SEL planning team in the Wheatland-Chili (NY) Central School District decided to embed the LLCs from the white paper into their grade 9-12 classrooms. To catalyze and inspire their planning, Principal Eric Windover drew upon the “snapshot” in the paper that demonstrates how a high school teacher naturally integrates the LLCs into an academic lesson in real time.



# Financial Summary

July 2017 – June 2018



Net Assets	6/30/18	6/30/17
Unrestricted	\$ 1,648,034	\$ 1,550,328
Temporarily Restricted	658,796	222,314
<b>Net Assets at End of Year</b>	<b>\$ 2,306,830</b>	<b>\$ 1,772,642</b>

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

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