

# ANNUAL REPORT 2015-2016



**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.

## Safe Public Spaces

Last year we designed a study to learn how well our Safe Public Spaces program promotes positive climates and reduces unwanted behaviors. We are partnering with the American Institutes for Research with funding provided by a grant from the National Institute of Justice. The study includes 24 middle schools in New York City and will continue for two school years. Through Safe Public Spaces, students experience an increased sense of physical safety and emotional well-being, as well as stronger connections to the adults in their schools.

As an example of a Safe Public Spaces strategy, adults consistently stand at known “hot spots” in hallways, stairwells, entrances, and exits where incidents tend to occur during passing time and at the start and end of the school day. Staff have been trained in techniques to keep students moving along using personal, positive reminders (“Good morning, Mo! I know you don’t want to be late”) and directives (“Dee, Ellie, and AJ, enjoy your conversation and keep moving along. We want everyone to get to class on time”). They also learn how to defuse and de-escalate flare-ups that may occur. All adults in the schools are trained: the custodial and cafeteria staff, clerical workers, safety officers, teaching staff, and the entire leadership team.



**Cover:** New sixth graders take part in an activity with their eighth grade buddies on orientation day at Grant Middle School, Syracuse, NY.



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# Message From the Executive Director

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Dear Friend,

Engaging Schools continues to provide national leadership in tackling the problem of the use, overuse, and disproportional use of punitive and exclusionary discipline. According to UCLA's Center for Civil Rights Remedies, nearly 3.5 million public school students were suspended out of school at least once during a recent school year. Data from various sources tells us that African-American students are more than three times as likely to be suspended as their White peers, and students with disabilities more than twice as likely to be suspended as their non-disabled peers.

We know that overly punitive discipline has a cascading negative impact. It results in greater school alienation and disengagement, loss of instructional time, and higher failure and drop-out rates.

One important way in which Engaging Schools addresses the problem is to help schools create what we call Engaged Classrooms. Lack of engagement contributes to behavior problems, which often result in referrals out of the classroom. Exclusion then contributes to further disengagement. It's a vicious cycle. A recent Gallup poll found that only half of adolescents report feeling engaged in school. Young people who are not engaged in school are at higher risk for poor academic achievement, attendance problems, and dropping out. Engaged Classrooms helps to reverse this cycle.

Through Engaged Classrooms institutes and coaching, teachers learn new strategies for providing effective classroom management, academic and behavior supports, and engaging instruction. Teachers also learn ways to build a foundation of mutual trust and respect, and use cultural competence to establish more personalized and positive relationships with students. Positive relationships are linked with student outcomes such as greater engagement,

persistence, self-efficacy, and sense of well-being.

Various studies support our approach. For example, a recent Stanford University study found that an intervention to help teachers and students empathize with one another halved the number of suspensions at five diverse middle schools. A second study by researchers from three prominent universities found that coaching focused on teachers' skills in effectively interacting with any student, and facilitating higher level thinking skills, problem-solving, and metacognition closed the racial discipline gap.

Last year we shared our approaches through professional learning for teachers and leaders in 218 schools in large districts such as New York City; Chicago, IL; Oakland, CA; Anchorage, AK; Denver, CO; and Charlotte- Mecklenburg, NC; as well as in many smaller districts. There are approximately 8,200 teachers in these schools that serve over 130,000 students, primarily in grades 6-12.

In addition to delivering professional services in schools, we reached 500 educational leaders through workshops at national and regional conferences, disseminated over 8,000 resources across the US, and reached 10,000 educators through our website and blog.

I am grateful for our many partners and supporters who join us to make this important work possible.

Thank you!



# Engaged Classrooms in Oakland

Lorene Lamb has been a resident of Oakland for over 90 years and loves the rich diversity of her city. She is a woman small in stature with an immense heart



and a deep passion for social justice. She also stays well informed about what's happening in education, especially in the Oakland schools. Lorene has been a supporter of Engaging Schools for three decades.

It is no wonder, then, that when we wanted to expand our Engaged Classrooms training to more teachers in Oakland, Lorene said yes to a major gift to make it happen. Upon learning of this generous act for the benefit of the teachers and young people in Oakland, the district's program manager for social and emotional learning, Meena Srinivasan, responded, "I'm in tears. This is such a gift. Christmas has come early."

Engaging Schools began implementing our Engaged Classrooms program with a small group of teachers at Skyline High School as a pilot project



*"The Engaged Classrooms Institute at Skyline High School was transformative for the 20 teachers who participated. Almost all of the teachers said that it was the best professional learning experience that they had ever had. It is very helpful for connecting social and emotional learning with academic engagement."*

*- Meena Srinivasan, Program Manager, Office of Social and Emotional Learning, Oakland Unified School District*

last year. Here is what some of the participants said about the impact of our training:

- "Without a doubt, this was the most useful professional development I've ever received. The learning approach isn't simply 'sit and get.' Instead, it's like you're a student, so it allows you to be in your students' shoes, to think what they might think and feel what they might feel. And that is really useful."
- "After doing the activators, students seemed to be more aware, more awake, more willing to engage. I think this approach builds relationships with students so that they trust you and you can teach them. It's definitely affecting my practice."
- "Having these tools and resources, combined with ideas of how to apply them in our classroom, makes it real and relatable, no matter what the content matter. My colleagues and I can all apply what we're learning in all of our classrooms."
- "We don't get many opportunities to have a voice in professional development. This approach gives us a toolbox to interact with, and then asks us to actually think about how we can modify the practices to complement what we're already doing. That is a very different experience."

# and Around the United States

Fortunately, Skyline High School found the funds to continue the program in the 2016-2017 school year, and Engaging Schools has started to train all of the teachers in the school.

Seeing its success for teachers at Skyline High, the district expressed the desire to bring the program to more schools but did not have the funds to do so. Lorene stepped in and provided support so that teams of teachers and administrators from other Oakland high schools will participate in our four-day Engaged Classrooms Institute in the fall of 2016.

Engaged Classrooms, one of our core programs, is being implemented in many other places. After starting to see declines in the problem of the overuse of harsh and exclusionary discipline in **Syracuse, NY**, the district recognized the need for additional professional learning, especially around engagement, and supported the implementation of Engaged Classrooms there. We facilitated Engaged Classrooms Institutes for three schools that are part of the Harlem Village Academies in **New York City**. The Alternate Learning Centers in all five of New York City's boroughs saw the value of Engaged Classrooms, and we worked with assistant principals from 37 of these small schools using a train-the-trainers model. In addition, our longtime district partner, the **Anchorage School District**, supported an Engaged Classrooms Institute for teams of teachers from across the district and our capacity-building training for key district staff.

*We also wish to thank Bay Area supporter Barbara Meislin who has been providing support for our work in Oakland for the past few years. With her help, we have provided our publications to many teachers and introduced our Schoolwide Discipline and Student Support program to several Oakland district leaders.*



## What Teachers Learn

Through our interactive Engaged Classrooms Institute, participants learn how to use high-impact practices in their classrooms that result in effective classroom management, positive approaches to discipline, and engaging instruction. These practices support students' academic success and help them become self-managed, socially-conscious, self-aware, and responsible decision makers. Some examples of the research-based practices included in Engaged Classrooms are:

- Academic press – expecting, insisting upon, and supporting every student's achievement
- Providing personalized support – relationships and good will
- Creating a cohesive community – group procedures, rituals, and routines
- Habits of learning – supporting self-discipline and self-regulation
- Managing disciplinary incidents – self-correction, de-escalation and problem-solving
- Differentiating instruction – providing students with choice, voice, and relevance

# Deepening Our Expertise

One of Engaging Schools' greatest strengths is our program staff who support schools and districts by providing training, coaching, mentoring, and consulting. These veteran educators have wide-ranging expertise in classroom practice and teacher effectiveness, English language learning, special education, cultural competence, social and emotional learning, and leadership development.

As part of our commitment to continual improvement, we periodically bring them together to foster their professional learning. Ten Engaging Schools program staff members met in Cambridge, MA for three intensive days to learn from other experts and each other.

They presented participatory sessions to their peers with new ideas for "gathering activities," conducting restorative group conferences,



Here are some examples of feedback we received on evaluation forms last year from participants in our training programs:

"[The facilitator] truly 'walked the talk' - she modeled everything she taught us consistently for four days."

"Great information base, sense of humor, helpful, and organized."

"Obviously a master teacher, with a warm and friendly demeanor."

"I want to comment on your facilitation - your sustained and consistent attention, focus, kindness, authentic interest, care, and clear instructions were noteworthy!"

and using "hip-pocket" skills - group facilitation techniques that accommodate different needs, interests, and points of view.

They deepened their knowledge of research on adolescent development from Engaging Schools Board member Jenny Nagaoka, Deputy Director of the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.

They participated in a session to add multiple perspectives into the development of our next publication, called *Engaged Classrooms*. This new book will join other Engaging Schools resources to form a library that supports our Engaged Classrooms program. In-person sessions such as this are invaluable in the development of our resources.

# Schoolwide Discipline and Student Support

Over the last year, Engaging Schools expanded its leadership role in advancing equitable, restorative, and accountable discipline and student support. We worked directly with schools and districts to make changes in practices and policies, began broad dissemination of a how-to leader's guide, launched a national advocacy campaign, and started a two-year research study about the impact of one of our programs (please see inside front cover).



## Supporting Schools

Last year we worked with schools in nine cities across the US to help them improve their discipline and student support practices. Here are some examples:

- We continued the work we began with the Syracuse City School District in 2013. We led professional learning sessions for teachers and instructional leaders from 16 schools in **Syracuse, NY** in September and January. We also worked more intensively in seven schools to integrate classroom management, discipline practices, and engaging instruction. District data over a three-year period (from 2013-2016) show:
  - > A marked decrease in all types of suspension; and therefore, in lost instructional days. In the 2013-14 school year, there were 15,000 suspensions (in- and out-of-school) and 24,700 instructional days lost. By the end of the 2015-16 school year, suspensions were reduced to under 10,400, and 12,250 fewer instructional days were lost.
  - > A downward trend in the use of punitive disciplinary measures and an increase in restorative practices. Punitive referrals made up 42 percent of all disciplinary referrals in the 2014-15 school year; last year that number dropped to 35 percent.

- Leadership teams from all 11 schools in **Holyoke, MA** gathered in late June to participate in our four-day Schoolwide Discipline and Student Support Institute. They worked hard to learn new approaches and create plans for the following school year. We supported new principals and assistant principals in **Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC** in developing discipline and support systems and structures that promote a positive climate and culture. In **New York City**, we worked with student support teams in a charter school network and helped set up an Intervention Center at a middle school to support the success of students returning to class after behavior incidents.

## Advocacy

With the support of the Foundation to Promote Open Society and the NoVo Foundation, we launched a two-year advocacy and communications campaign to raise awareness among education leaders about the need to move beyond merely reducing suspensions and implementing a few restorative practices to addressing the entire system of schoolwide discipline and student support. So far, we've published two articles in *Principal Leadership* magazine, participated in panels or led workshops at three national conferences for 500 education

*continued on page 6*

# Schoolwide Discipline and Student Support

continued from page 5

leaders, disseminated *Shifting Gears* to more than 50 thought leaders (including many within the US Dept. of Education), and conducted five leadership institutes in four regions.

## Tools for Leaders

*Shifting Gears: Recalibrating Schoolwide Discipline and Student Support* – our newest resource – is in its second printing with nearly 1,000 copies already distributed, primarily to school and district leaders. This book has been widely praised and plays an important role in our institutes.



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