Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friend,

2019-2020 was a school year like no other, divided into two dramatically different parts. Prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, we revised our vision and mission statement:

Engaging Schools envisions school communities where all adults are empowered to support each and every student to strengthen the skills and mindsets needed to thrive and make positive contributions in school, work, and life. To achieve this, we collaborate with educators to create equitable and engaging classrooms and schools that support students’ academic, social, and emotional learning and development.

We also put the finishing touches on a four-year strategic plan for increasing our impact and expanding our reach.

We made a lot of headway helping school districts recalibrate and implement new Codes of Character, Conduct, and Support that serve as a foundation for increasing racial and educational equity. We widely disseminated our new book, Engaged Classrooms: The Art & Craft of Reaching and Teaching All Learners, which provides a compelling set of strategies for strengthening the social, emotional, and learning competencies that are essential to the success of each and every student in school, work, and life.

When the pandemic struck and schools closed, Engaging Schools immediately got to work converting from in-person to virtual professional learning sessions. We developed agendas and processes for effective online sessions and were able to continue our partnerships with a number of districts. The feedback we’re getting from district and school leaders tells us that our support has been invaluable in light of all the challenges they are facing.

Given all that’s happening in our country, including divided politics, the pandemic, and the movement for racial justice—and their profound impact on students and teachers—the need for creating engaging and equitable classrooms and schools cannot be overstated. Engaging Schools remains able to help many thousands of dedicated educators get through this unprecedented time with the support of our funders and allies. Thank you so much for your continued partnership.

In Memoriam: Deborah Childs-Bowen

Deborah Childs-Bowen was a member of our board of directors for twelve years, and its chairperson for over seven of those years. She passed away in December, 2019. She spent her life working to improve leadership, teacher training, and the delivery of quality education for children. She was passionate about diversity, equity, and inclusion, and about creating schools where each and every young person felt welcomed and could thrive. She is profoundly missed.
Tackling Racial and Educational Equity Issues in Schools

The national reckoning on racial injustice has reached a new level of intensity and the need for school discipline reform is as urgent as ever. A 2020 study found that Black girls in Massachusetts are nearly four times more likely to be disciplined at school—and five times more likely to be suspended—than white girls, even though they have no demonstrably higher rates of unwanted behavior. Many other subgroups of students also experience disproportional, exclusionary discipline at high rates. One impact is the loss of learning time, which can put them even further behind.

The transformative role of Codes of Character, Conduct, and Support

To significantly address this equity problem, districts need to shift to systems, policies, and practices that are fair, respectful, restorative, accountable, and viable. A powerful starting point is to recalibrate the Codes of Conduct that govern their disciplinary policies and practices, starting by analyzing their data in order to reveal the scope of racial and other disparities. This provides the foundation for a task force of stakeholders to define a new vision for addressing punitive, exclusionary, and disproportional discipline and create and implement a reimagined Code of Character, Conduct, and Support.

Engaging Schools is the national leader in supporting districts to create and implement these kinds of Codes, with positive results. For example, in the Syracuse City School District, Code revision and implementation played a major role in achieving significant reductions in office referrals and suspensions and in the lost learning time that resulted. In addition, the District achieved significant reductions in the discipline disproportionality gap for Black, Hispanic, and special education students in both office referrals and out-of-school suspensions.

This past year, Engaging Schools further refined its approach to Code recalibration, which includes three phases: assessment, development, and implementation. We supported various stages of Code work with district

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) at the Forefront

Codes of Character, Conduct, and Support are rooted in the principles of SEL. Code implementation includes promoting these skills and equipping teachers with strategies to prevent unwanted behaviors from the outset. Toolboxes and professional learning help teachers to model and teach competencies such as self-control, impulse control, effective communication, healthy relationships, cooperation, participation, and academic efficacy. The benefits include increases in student self-awareness, a sense of belonging in the classroom, and positive social relationships, all of which reduce disciplinary problems and promote healthy development.
and school partners in Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, and Minnesota. Combined, these partners serve 71,000 students in 126 schools with significant race and class diversity: students of color make up 53 percent of the collective student population, and nearly half of the students are economically disadvantaged. Here are examples of our work in two districts:

Pittsfield (MA) Public Schools

We have been working with the Pittsfield Public Schools on Code recalibration since spring, 2018. The work has been so successful that district leaders Joe Curtis and Ann Marie Carpenter joined Engaging Schools Secondary Specialist Carol Lieber to co-present a two-hour workshop for their colleagues on “Drafting and Implementing a Revised District Code of Conduct” at the statewide Leading with Access and Equity Convening in Massachusetts in fall, 2019.

At that time, their Code implementation was just getting started. Ann Marie shared their experience of the first weeks of the school year:

The vast majority of feedback we’ve gotten from staff has been very positive. They like the consistency, and they like the emphasis we’ve placed that we’re in this together. The administration can’t change this, and the staff can’t change it alone, so we have to do it together.

We began helping Pittsfield implement two structures last year that they deemed priorities: Restorative In-School Suspension Education (RISE) rooms and Reset Centers. RISE rooms are places where students are held accountable for unwanted behavior, can restore their good standing, and learn critical life and learning competencies, skills, and target behaviors. Reset Centers are central locations where staff immediately respond to students with behavioral and emotional issues who then benefit from a short period of time to regain their composure before returning to their learning environment. Pittsfield is preparing to implement these in all their middle and high schools when schools open again for in-person learning.
Chapel Hill-Carrboro (NC) City Schools

Engaging Schools worked with a task force from the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools (CHCCS) to complete the recalibration of their Community Code of Character, Conduct, and Support. The process was a huge success, as captured in these comments from task force members:

Before the task force, I thought our Code of Conduct was just general rules for behavior/discipline in the district. Now I’m thinking our revised Code is a thorough document that serves as a guide on how to encourage positive, restorative behavior for students, teachers, and other adults. My biggest hope is that the revised Code of Conduct will lead to equitable and just discipline in the district.

Our former Code was short and focused only on discipline and consequences. Our new Community Code of Character, Conduct, and Support is now comprehensive and a pathway to restorative practices and equitable learning.

By involving many stakeholders in the Code recalibration process, a strong foundation was laid for implementation. That process began in May when Engaging Schools and district staff co-led orientations to the new Code for school leaders. Dr. Charlos Banks, Senior Executive Director of Student Services, commented:

The sessions went extremely well with our school leaders. They feel very informed, excited, and optimistic about making changes in disciplinary practices to positively impact our youth.

CHCCS is continuing its partnership with Engaging Schools to implement and sustain the Code district-wide. We have co-developed a professional learning and support plan to ensure that the conditions necessary to provide a fair, equitable, accountable, and restorative discipline policy will be in place. We're using a coaching model to maximize capacity in the coordinators of the various implementation teams and school leaders to sustain and monitor implementation.
Other Highlights

Implementing Engaged Classrooms Across the US

We partnered with 13 districts and/or schools in the northeast, southeast, west, and Alaska as well as with the Minnesota Department of Education to provide in-person and remote professional learning on our Engaged Classrooms approach for district leaders, administrators, teachers, and student support staff. In Pittsfield (MA) and Orange County (NC), we facilitated trainings that were in turn presented to every teacher in each district – a total of 1,010.

Ramping up Engagement in Virtual Learning

In response to the needs of schools that began operating virtually in the spring, we drew from our Engaged Classrooms approach, our decades of experience fostering student-teacher relationships, and best practices in remote learning to develop a new virtual professional learning series for middle and high school educators, Ramping Up Academic Engagement and Support in Virtual Learning. It focuses on integrating strategies that foster engagement and support students’ academic, social, and emotional development in remote learning environments. In addition to providing this for teachers in our current district sites, the Massachusetts Teachers Association is offering this service to teachers across the state.
Financial Summary

July 2019 — June 2020

Revenue & Support $1,905,499
- Contract Revenue 60%
- Contributions & Grants 33%
- Publication Sales 6%
- Other Income 1%

Expenses $1,940,796
- Program Services 77%
- Management & General 17%
- Fundraising 6%

Net Assets 6/30/20 6/30/19
- Unrestricted $1,770,338 $1,805,635
- Temporarily Restricted 252,501 490,381
- Net Assets at End of Year $2,022,839 $2,296,016

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

Board of Directors

LARRY DIERINGER
Executive Director
Engaging Schools
Cambridge, MA

LARRE J. HALL
Former Chief Executive Officer
NEWCorp
Oceanside, CA

ANGELA HERNANDEZ-MARSHALL
Washington, DC

JANICE E. JACKSON
Senior Advisor for Equity and Inclusion
Transformative Educational Leadership
Newark, CA

STEPHANIE JONES
Gerald S. Lesser Professor in Early Childhood Development
Harvard Graduate School of Education
Cambridge, MA

MARIKO LOCKHART
Director
Seattle Office for Civil Rights
Seattle, WA

SUSAN FOLLETTI LUSI
President & CEO
Mass Insight Education & Research
Boston, MA

JENNY NAGAOKA
Deputy Director
University of Chicago Consortium on School Research
Chicago, IL

JAN PHLEGAR
Former Executive Director
Learning Innovations at WestEd
Woburn, MA

LESLIE RENNIE-HILL
Education Consultant
LRH Consulting
Portland, OR

DAVID RUFF
Executive Director
Great Schools Partnership
Portland, ME

ROY SCHIFFLITI
Associate Dean, Administration & Finance
Bouvé College of Health Sciences
Northeastern University
Boston, MA

MIRELLIE VAZQUEZ
Executive Director
Tauck Family Foundation
Wilton, CT

NANCY WILSKER
Partner
Hinkley Allen
Boston, MA

WAYNE YOUNG
Vice President of Corporate Citizenship
State Street Foundation
Boston, MA

23 Garden Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
617-492-1764
www.engagingschools.org

Photo credits:
Cover, page 1, page 2 (bottom), and page 3 (top) courtesy of Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for American Education: Images of Teachers and Students in Action; inside front cover (top) Schipper+Martin, (bottom) Merrill Shea; page 2 (top) courtesy Syracuse City School District; page 4 Engaging Schools Design: Bryant Design & Illustration