

ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020



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 competen-

cies 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.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Larry Diering". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

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

continued

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.

Codes of Character, Conduct, and Support



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.

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:



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.

Codes of Character, Conduct, and Support

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.

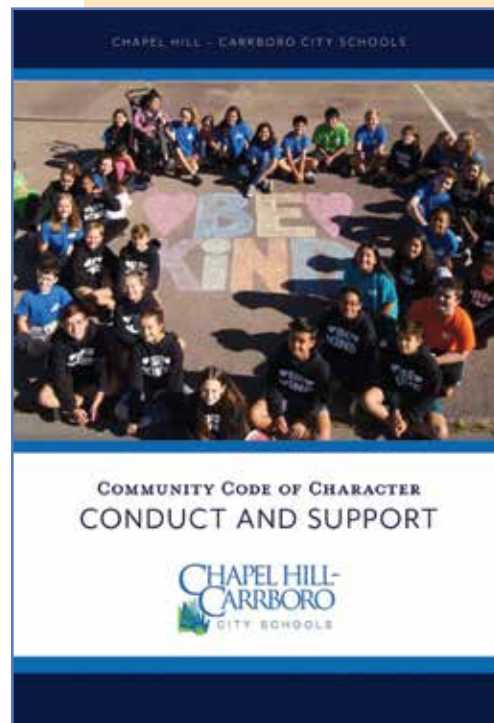
Our former Code was short and focused only on discipline and consequences. Our new Community Code of Character, Conduct, and Support is now comprehensive and a pathway to restorative practices and equitable learning.

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:

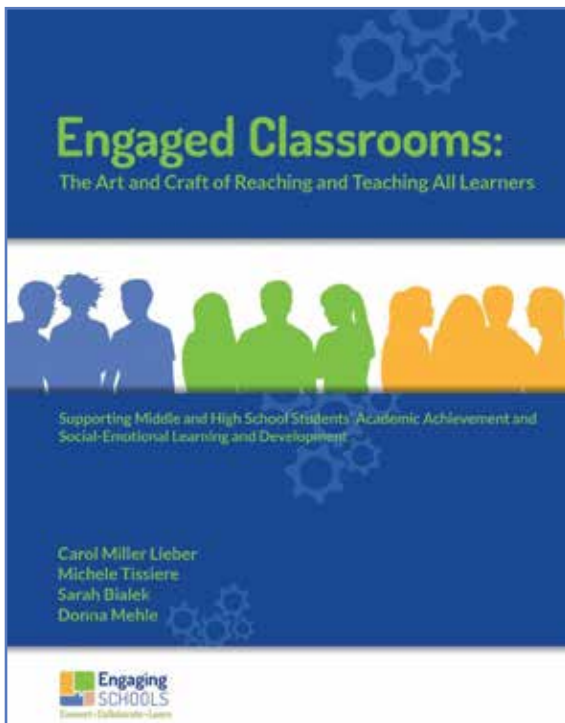
The sessions went extremely well with our school leaders. They feel very informed, excited, and optimistic about making changes in disciplinary practices to positively impact our youth.

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



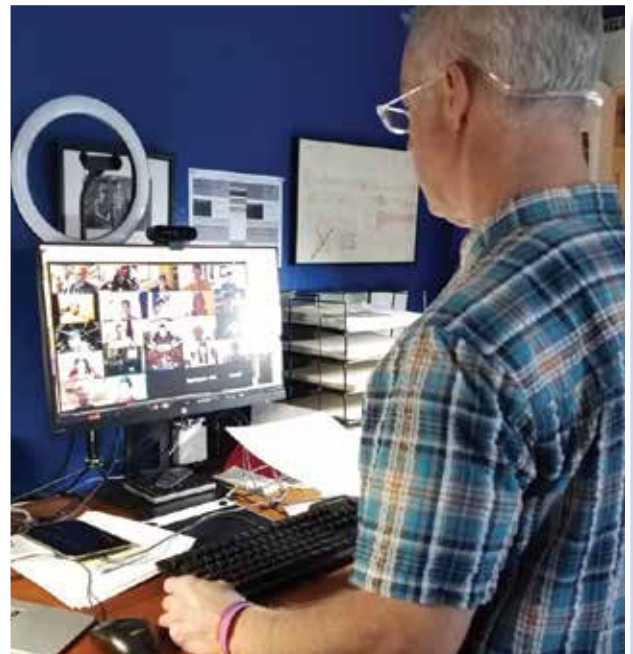
Called “another outstanding Engaging Schools publication” by Maurice Elias, Co-Director of the Academy for Social-Emotional Learning in Schools at Rutgers University, our new book presents a compelling set of evidence-based strategies for middle and high schools that support equity-centered classrooms and social and emotional learning and development. The book has already made its way into the hands of 2,000 educators. The Syracuse (NY) City Schools purchased 500 copies for leaders and new teachers. And more than 150 education thought leaders and professors in schools of education nationwide received complimentary copies, thanks to a gift from a generous donor.

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

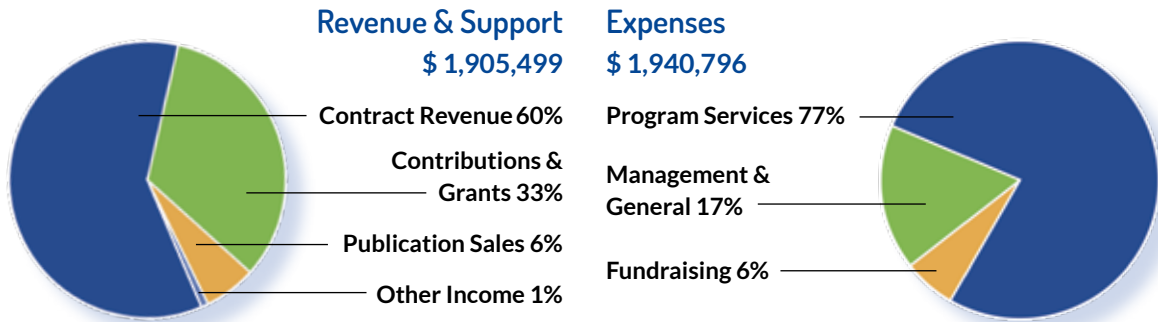
In response to the needs of schools that began operating virtually in the spring, we drew from our Engaged Classrooms approach, our decades of experience fostering student-teacher relationships, and best practices in remote learning to develop a new virtual professional learning series for middle and 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



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.

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