



Annual Report 2020

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility

A message from our executive director

I've seen how we can build community, even now

Last May I got a call from the principal of a New York City high school. “It feels like I am in a war zone,” she told me. Her entire school community was distraught. They had lost seven parents to the coronavirus. At the same time, the school community – like every school community – was facing a second pre-existing pandemic: racism. The continuing police killings of Black men and women had caused trauma. One of the school’s track stars had confided that he had been scared to run outside since the murder of Ahmaud Arbery in February of 2020.

I’d last heard from Principal Pagee Cheung several months earlier, when she had wanted to discuss whether Morningside Center might coach her staff in providing social and emotional supports for students at her school. Pagee’s high school, located in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Bushwick, has about 460 students, some 80 percent of whom are Latinx.

Luckily, Pagee’s school, MESA (Math, Engineering, and Science Academy), is part of a network of schools supported by the Charles Hayden Foundation, so she had somewhere to turn for support as the Covid crisis deepened. Many schools were not so fortunate.

As Morningside Center supporters and partners well know, culturally competent SEL has perhaps never been more important – for both young people and adults. Schools across the country, including MESA, are struggling not only with virtual or hybrid learning, but also with the continued anxiety, hardship, and loss generated by the coronavirus. In one school we work with, 39 parents or caregivers died in the span of six months.

To take on this grief and anxiety, we must take swift yet considered action. Students need a level of social and emotional support that



has yet to become standard across schools. As educators, to deliver what is needed in this moment, we must ground our actions in three foundational truths:

1. SEL is not an “extra.”

SEL can no longer sit in the “nice to have” category. An extensive new study by the Wallace Foundation and the RAND Foundation has added to the mountain of evidence that SEL should

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Cassie Schwerner (above)

Morningside's progress in 2020

It's been a year of anxiety, dislocation, and loss for young people, educators, schools, and communities. It's also been a time of racial reckoning.

There has never been a greater need for the work we do in schools and after-school programs to build community, promote caring and empathy, advance racial awareness and equity, address grief and loss, and promote self-care.



Here are some ways that we at Morningside were able to meet the needs of school communities during this year of crisis.

- ◆ We created scores of classroom activities and guidelines to address the sense of disconnection and uncertainty among young people and adults, as well as the loss faced disproportionately by Black and brown families. Hundreds of thousands of educators downloaded these extensive free resources. **Our website traffic increased by 89 percent.**
- ◆ The NYC Department of Education recognized that in this year of upheaval, summer school programs needed to emphasize social and emotional learning. In June, they called us for help. In the span of a few weeks, our staff created a 44-unit curriculum with multiple short activities on community, respect, empathy, anger, decision-making, conflict, oppression, and joy. **We then delivered a training for 1600 summer school teachers – 75 cohorts in 48 hours!**
- ◆ We quickly **adapted our training, coaching, and curricula for virtual classrooms.** By the fall, we had begun working with the New York City Department of Education, other districts, and a host of new schools to provide online training and coaching for hundreds of educators.
- ◆ During this era of racial reckoning, more schools and organizations **sought out our expertise in racial equity** and cultural awareness. We have updated our 5-day training to be responsive to this moment.
- ◆ Our three **PAZ after-school programs never shut down.** Whether working in person or remotely, our programs continued to provide much needed support for young people and their families in Brooklyn and the Bronx.
- ◆ We used Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) funds **to tap the creativity and expertise of our 30+ staff developers.** They worked in teams to enrich our curricula and models – including by integrating our racial equity approaches more fully. They also created more Spanish translations of our materials.
- ◆ We're gratified that a wide range of schools – including public schools in New York City and other parts of the country, charter schools, and private schools – have all realized that social and emotional learning and racial equity must be incorporated into their work with young people and adults every day. **We're delighted to have worked with so many new partners in 2020.**



Brooklyn School Takes on the Coronavirus: “I was amazed at what this conversation turned into”

One week before the Covid pandemic lockdown in March 2020, Morningside Center staff developer **Marisa Zalabak** was asked to join a restorative circle facilitated by a third-grade teacher in a Brooklyn elementary school.

That school, PS 169, is located in the diverse immigrant neighborhood of Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Some 62 percent of the students are Asian-American, and another 33 percent are Latinx.

It was in one of the school’s bilingual classrooms, with approximately thirty students, that Marisa says she “experienced a profound example of the power of restorative circles.”

In this circle, the teacher, Jeanette Echeverri, wanted to allow students to share their thoughts about the coronavirus that had started moving through the city. She invited students to reflect on three questions and share their responses in turn: What did they think and feel about the virus? How were their families doing? And what could they as a community do about it?

On the first question, some students passed on their opportunity to speak, while others expressed confusion. “I heard it’s from Corona beer,” said

one student. “I think it’s just a cold,” said another. Others expressed how they felt scared for themselves and their families: “I’m worried that if I get sick, I can’t have the operation I need.” And, “I don’t want my mom to get sick.”

Then, one of the students, who is Chinese-American, shared how sad and angry he felt after an experience in the supermarket with his mother and sister. There, he said, a woman had moved her child away from them, saying, “You can get the coronavirus from them. It’s a Chinese disease.”

After hearing this, a classmate who is Mexican-American responded, “You know what that was? That was racism. I need you to know that was racism, and racism is bad. The coronavirus is not a Chinese virus, and you need to know that. What that lady said was racist and rude, and you don’t have to take that. The next time somebody tells you that, you tell them that they are racist!”

Ms. Echeverri paused to ask the student what she thought racism was. The student responded, “When somebody makes you feel bad about where you are from.”

Ms. Echeverri later told Marisa: “She had so

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much conviction in her eyes. I was blown away with the way she came to her peer's defense, and how angry she was that this person had hurt her friend's feelings."

After that, the conversation took off. "They think we're all the same, no matter where we come from," said one student. Another said, "This is the same as saying, 'All Mexican people are bad people.' Most of the time white people say that when they don't even know where we come from... and we're not bad, either. Why do white people act like that?"

The students' comments made it clear to Marisa just "how many inequities these young students—8 to 9 years old—already had experienced or witnessed day after day."

With her last prompt, Ms. Echeverri asked students to consider what they could do about this problem as a community. Once again, hands shot up. One student said, "Even if we only have a little money, we could go and give people who are living on the streets hand sanitizer, because they might spread it and they have nowhere to go and they can't buy anything." Another said, "We could

get people to go fight for them to have a place to stay."

Afterwards, Ms. Echeverri told Marisa, "I felt like this was a perfect example of the community in our class. I was amazed at what the conversation turned into."

This inspiring example of community didn't happen by accident.

A year before, PS 169 had sent seven educators to take part in Morningside Center's 5-day training in SEL, restorative practices, and racial equity. As the focus of the training turned to understanding systemic racism and oppression, the school's principal, Eujin Tang, asked our DOE co-organizer how she could accelerate the process of getting her entire staff trained. She explained that the staff wanted to create a school community where social responsibility was reflected not only in the classroom and with the students, but in every aspect of daily life in and outside of the school.

"We began to understand that academics can't happen if children don't feel safe, acknowledged, seen and heard," said Principal Tang.

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2020's Lessons for Schools

2020 was a potent reminder of what a critical role school plays in ensuring that our young people are connected, supported, and encouraged. This past year reinforced for us that:

Schools must center race and honor the voices of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. We need to support educators in centering race, racism, and in challenging white supremacy both in themselves and in schools and other institutions. Schools need to provide space for Black, brown, and Indigenous people to do the work they must do to challenge white supremacy – and to heal. Schools also need to create spaces where white educators can work together to undo the messages, confusion, and biases they carry as white people. Morningside

has put a priority on making sure that our models, materials, and approaches are effective in uprooting racism in our schools.

Especially in times of crisis, young people – and adults – must feel a sense of care, connection, and belonging at school. We can't ignore the anxiety, uncertainty, and trauma that is so widespread in our school communities. School can and must be a place where young people get support from peers and adults, develop skills in self-care, and are encouraged to find joy and gain agency in their lives and in the world. Our school communities are hungry to collectively build skills to heal and process the loss and grief of the past year, ease stress and anxiety, and collectively address our challenges – now and in the future.

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Schools must encourage active and informed civic engagement - and that begins with creating supportive, culturally competent classrooms. Educators need skills and tools to discuss difficult issues with students – and strategies to encourage students’ awareness, critical thinking, and active engagement. Social and emotional skills, including active listening, empathy, racial awareness, and cultural competency, are key for effective civic engagement – and that engagement is essential! We have found that boosting these skills and creating a caring classroom environment where students have voice and agency make it possible to have productive conversations about the challenging issues we face.

We can foster connection and community online. Building community and fostering relationships is key to our well-being as humans – and we’ve learned that this connection can be

nurtured online. Face-to-face communication has been at the core of Morningside’s work, from intimate circles with talking pieces to hands-on coaching and support for teachers. However, finding ways to engender that sense of connection online is important in this age, and we can do it through warm and skillful facilitation, small-group breakout rooms, and activities specifically designed for online engagement. It is critical that we support school staff and young people to prioritize relationships in schools, both virtual and physical.

Morningside Center arrives at this moment with tools and knowledge educators need to foster collaborative, supportive, and equitable schools that promote student engagement. In 2021 and beyond, we aim to seize this moment, to build on our model of whole-school change and share it, taking it to new places and to new depths in the years to come.



We Can Build Community (continued from page 2)

be a "foundational element" of what adults do in schools – and that SEL benefits all students, not just those with behavioral issues. The study also found that school staff must understand their own social and emotional capacities before they can teach those competencies to their students.

2. We must be race-conscious, not race neutral.

SEL must be grounded in a careful process of building racial awareness and cultural competency. In New York City, 85 percent of students are BIPOC. Not only have these

students been hit harder by the pandemic, but they were already dealing with manifestations of racism in their neighborhoods and schools, and, of course, with the police.

Even the much-needed racial reckoning now underway adds to

the stress students and educators of color are facing this year. One Black principal commented to me that it was "unnerving" to see her white colleagues suddenly realize that there is still racism in America. It's a sentiment I've heard repeatedly from Black colleagues in recent months.

3. Our students need authentic connections and relationships.

The power of relationships can be transformative. However, to be authentic, they must respect and honor students' own voices, their experiences, their traditions, and cultures. Building relationships is, of course, best done in person – not remotely. But, as many of us have discovered this year through necessity,

relationships can be built in virtual communities.

In late August, our Morningside team began working remotely with Pagee and her peers in five other schools in the Hayden Foundation network – and together we are learning new ways of creating connections.

For example, in physical schools, we use circles to build relationships among students during advisory periods. There are important rituals for creating effective circles. Being seated in a circle, using a talking piece and a meaningful center piece, sharing values, and creating community agreements all help make the physical circle a powerful container for building trust and connection. (It's important to note that we did not invent these practices. They were created and used by indigenous peoples throughout history and across the globe.)

At MESA, advisory teachers have invented virtual centerpieces and brought student voice into the circle by creating avatars, using emojis, and having students adopt personal fonts and colors. Identity matters. It needs to be honored. MESA's guidance counselor, Lourdes Carrasco, sums it up nicely: "The more we invite our young people into the co-creation of our shared spaces, the more included they feel. That's the essence of this work: to include, see, and honor our young people for who they are and wish to become."

Fortunately, MESA is one example of many. Schools across the country – and certainly here in New York City – are working to deepen their staff and students' social and emotional skills (from active listening and empathy to standing up to bullying), advance racial awareness – and provide mutual support for one another as we struggle through this pandemic. But schools need more support for this work, urgently.

When our community is consciously and collaboratively built, we can create the connections we all crave – even at this most disconnected and challenging of times. ♦





Brooklyn School Takes on Coronavirus (continued from page 5)

Dozens of PS 169 staff members eventually signed up for our training. And at the school, more teachers began using circles, teaching SEL skills, and intentionally building community in their classrooms each week using our 4Rs curriculum (Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution).

Amid the pandemic lockdown, says Marisa, the school's leaders and staff never stopped using all the restorative tools at their disposal to provide support and promote equity, not just for students but for the entire community. The equity leadership team organized restorative circles with family members on challenges they faced, including Covid and immigration issues.

The school also requested remote sessions for the staff on trauma, self-care, and resilience to help cope with the loss and racial violence the entire community was experiencing. We provided professional and personal support for the staff on well-being and staying connected, both onsite and virtually.

Marisa also worked with the school to create support groups for those experiencing racism and inequity that were open to all Sunset Park residents. This incredible school community, reflecting the dreams expressed by that third-grade class, also came together to collect and distribute food for families who had lost income

due to the pandemic.

In one of the final in-person whole-staff meetings before the lockdown, teachers shared how they had facilitated an activity with students to create thousands of colorful folded paper cranes with messages of hope for the community.

Says Marisa: "It was another demonstration of what is possible when a community takes responsibility for creating a more just, loving, and kind world, beginning at school." ♦



Operating Budget FY 2020

Budget:

NYC Department of Education	963,263
After-School Programs	1,506,605
Federal Contracts	680,599
U.S. Treasury PPP Loan	680,112
Other Contracts	341,665
Foundations & Corporations	688,888
Individual Donations	90,288
Learning Kits & Other Revenue	90,051

Total Revenue: 5,041,471

Expenses:

Personnel Services	4,350,215
Direct Program Expenses	357,641
General & Administrative OTPS	411,028
Total Expenses:	5,118,884
Deficit:	77,413

Remembering Our Colleague Edwin Figueroa



We are heartbroken by the loss of our beloved friend and colleague, Edwin Figueroa. Edwin, a long-time Morningside Center staff developer, died from Covid.

In April 2020 our staff shared our grief over losing Edwin, and also our joy to have known him. Over and over, people spoke of how Edwin exuded kindness, warmth, and concern for all, every day.

One colleague observed: "Edwin showed what love looks and feels like in action. I have deep respect for his decades of service to make schools and communities and the world a better place, an equitable place, for all of us, for all the children."

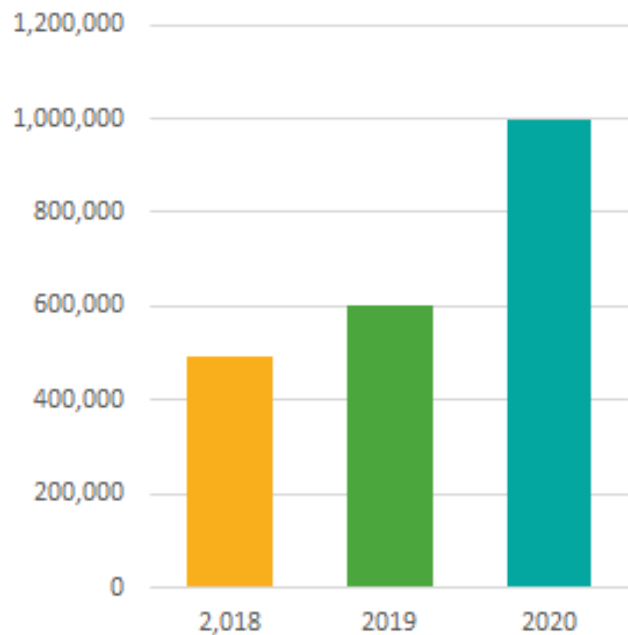
Another colleague shared: "Your light will last an eternity. Blessed Edwin TE AMO!"

Website Traffic Skyrockets!

As soon the pandemic hit, we began creating and posting to our TeachableMoment website activities to help educators address the anxiety, dislocation, and grief students were feeling. In the spring and summer, we added new lessons to help students grapple with the historic Black Lives Matter protests and the growing racial reckoning. We also posted lessons on the momentous elections and political news of the year.

Educators snapped up these resources, leading to a surge of traffic on our website. (See the graph at right.)

TeachableMoment funds come almost exclusively from individual contributions. We are grateful to all those who have donated to Morningside. You've helped provide teachers with free, relevant teaching ideas and lessons during a year of great need.



PAZ After-School Delivers Joy

Despite the turmoil of the year, our three PAZ after-school programs never shut down – they transitioned quickly to online and kept on providing love and support for hundreds of children. At the end of the school year, we sent every child home with a backpack filled with games, supplies, food, and other goodies.



Black Lives Matter at School

Police murders of Black people and the ongoing global reckoning with white supremacy has underscored the urgency of Morningside's deepening focus on racial equity and justice.

Early in the year, we created working groups of staff developers to enrich our curricula, training, and coaching by further embedding a racial equity lens. The curriculum work continues in 2021.

In the moment, we responded to the BLM uprisings by creating and sharing lessons and essays to engage both young people and adults in grappling with white supremacy and learning about Black-led movements for justice. We posted guidelines for student listening circles and activities that invite students to hear and reflect on the voices of protesters, as well as the

art and words of other young people.

Our white staff issued a call to white educators to actively work to undo racism in themselves and their schools, pledging our ongoing support for educators in having courageous conversations on race. As staff developer Dionne Grayman urged in her essay, "We must not be complicit and co-conspirators in the act of not allowing Black students to just BE their wonderfully made selves."

The photos above are from the Black Lives Matter at School symposium we co-sponsored with Bank Street's Center on Culture and Race Equity in February: Morningside's Senior Program Manager Daniel Coles (top left); BLM at School panelists (top right) and Morningside staff members at the symposium.

We are so excited to welcome four new members to our Board this year!



Gisela Alvarez led the Donors' Education Collaborative at The New York Community Trust, where she worked to improve NYC's public schools through system-wide policy reform. Before that, as Senior Project Director at Advocates for Children of New York, she founded and directed legal services programs and led initiatives on school and district accountability; push-out and illegal exclusion of at-risk students; graduation requirements; teacher evaluation; and the needs of immigrant students, youth in foster care, and students with disabilities.



Miyoko Brunner is Interim Development Director at City University of New York School of Law, where she manages fundraising in support of student opportunities, clinical programs, and special initiatives. Before that, Miyoko spent over 11 years at the international human rights organization WITNESS, leading events and individual philanthropy strategy and programs. She has consulted and volunteered for organizations including American Documentary, Grand Street Settlement, SparkNYC, and The ELM Project. Miyoko is a proud native New Yorker who now resides in Brooklyn with her husband.



Fred Frelow is a former public school teacher, a school administrator, and a leader in philanthropy specializing in school finance and innovative professional development strategies. At both the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, Fred's leadership advanced racial and fiscal equity throughout our nation's public schools. He is kind, caring, and has deep insights about teaching and learning. Fred is a Senior Fellow with the Aspen Institute's Criminal Justice Reform Initiative.



Robert Kim, as a former ACLU attorney, advised thousands of educators on civil rights and school climate issues in public schools, and worked in the U.S. Department of Education under President Obama to eliminate punitive discipline policies. He's also a former curriculum writer and teacher trainer who has authored materials to counter bullying and harassment in schools. Most recently, Bob authored *Elevating Equity and Justice: Ten U.S. Supreme Court Cases Every Teacher Should Know*.

Our staff

Sara Carrero, Communications Associate
Daniel Coles, Senior Program Manager
Katrena Dennard, Director of Finance
Leslie Dennis, Program Associate
Sully Diaz, Senior Program Manager
Larry Garvin, Chief Financial Officer
Maria Fuentes, PAZ Program Director
Yaritza Hernandez, PAZ Program Manager
Bryanna Kolja, PAZ Program Director
Doris Lo, Director of School-Based Operations
Tala Manassah, Deputy Executive Director
Ann Mathews, Human Resources Director
Laura McClure, Director of Fundraising & Communications
Cassie Schwerner, Executive Director
Marilyn Torres, PAZ Program Director
Joseph Yabyabin, Human Resources Assistant
Cecilia Xu, Finance Assistant

Our staff developers

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Mamzelle Adolphine
Lili Arkin
Jonah Braverman
Victoria Cheng-Gorini
Ava Daniel
Javier Francisco Diaz
Tresa Elguera
Nelly Espina
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Ife Lenard
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Angela Polite
DaRon Ross
Jenny Seaquist
Nicole Smith
Laurine Towler
Marieke van Woerkom
Nabil Vinas
Elizabeth Young
Marisa Zalabak

Our New Mission & Vision Statement

Morningside Center envisions a society where people are active participants in creating a culture of liberation, healing, and deep connection to their communities, natural environments, and the world. Our mission is to facilitate transformative experiences for members of the school community to co-create joyful, equitable, and rigorous learning environments.

Thank you,
Board of Directors!

Joyce Dudley, Chair
Gisela Alvarez
Miyoko Brunner
Luther Flurry, Treasurer
Fred Frelow
Christina Fuentes, Secretary
Emma Gonzalez, Vice Chair
Robert Kim
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Ashley Patterson
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Thank you,
foundation friends!

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Long Island Community Fund
New York Community Trust
NoVo Foundation
Trinity Wall Street
Anonymous

... and thank you, individual donors!



The Future of Education is Calling Us Forward!

The image above and on the cover are from a new video that captures Morningside's vision for the future of education. We're grateful to our fellow changemakers at Media Sutra for partnering with us on this project! Visit our homepage to watch: morningsidecenter.org

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