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Annual Report 2018

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility



“If I were introducing Morningside Center to a school or district who didn’t know them, I would tell them that for every dollar that a school invests in working with Morningside, they’ll get many, many more dollars back in terms of the impact on the school’s culture and climate and the pedagogical practice of teachers and counselors.”

Connie Cuttle, retired Executive Director of School Culture and Climate for NYC Department of Education

Interview with Executive Director Cassie Schwerner

Our new ED reflects on the promise of this moment

On November 5, 2018, Cassie Schwerner became Morningside Center’s new Executive Director, picking up the baton from Tom Roderick, who had led the organization for 35 years. Cassie comes to Morningside Center from The Schott Foundation for Public Education, where she worked to promote racial justice in education. We asked Cassie to tell us how these first months have been, and where she sees us going in the months and years ahead.

How has it been to step into the job of Morningside Center’s first new executive director since 1983? Be honest!

You know, a lot of people have compared Tom to Mr. Rogers, the gentle host of PBS’s program Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood. So, all you have to do is imagine me trying to take over as host after Fred Rogers. It was daunting to think of the shoes (and sweater!) I was stepping into. So, rather than thinking of it that way, I decided to take a different approach. I spent my first few months at Morningside listening. Listening to staff (including staff developers), the board, funders, and other key stakeholders to see what was essential to Morningside’s success and what we might need to change in order to grow into our next phase of work.

What brought you to Morningside Center?

I loved my work at The Schott Foundation for Public Education – especially the amazing staff, board, and the organizers, parents, and teachers from across the country that I had the privilege of working with. But I was also craving a change. I wanted to develop the muscles and skills needed to lead an organization. I thought Morningside Center was the perfect place for me because our work is at the nexus of educational equity and racial justice, and everything we do fits in the context of a larger vision of social change. Then, when I met the staff at Morningside, I knew I had found the right next home!

What has surprised you most since you got to Morningside Center?

What has surprised me the most is the way that the teachers and other staff in the schools we work with really want to embrace the often-difficult conversation about race – or, borrowing from Glenn Singleton, “courageous conversations” about race.



Cassie visits our PAZ after-school program at PS 214

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Connect with us!

TeachableMoment

The TeachableMoment section of our website includes hundreds of free classroom resources, with new lessons posted weekly. You’ll find strategies for integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) and restorative practices into your classroom practice, activities to help you address current issues, and more!

Explore TeachableMoment: morningsidecenter.org/teachable-moment

Newsletters

Get helpful resources in your inbox. Every two weeks, we’ll bring you:

- info on upcoming Morningside Center workshops and events
- new classroom lessons to engage students in the current issues and build their SEL skills
- articles on SEL, restorative practices, and racial equity
- teaching ideas and stories from the classroom

Sign up: morningsidecenter.org/newsletter

Webinars

Watch our webinars hosted by the American Federation of Teachers’ Share My Lesson, available on demand for PD credit! We share concrete classroom strategies to help educators foster SEL and create more caring and equitable classroom communities.

Watch Morningside Center’s webinars: morningsidecenter.org/webinars



“This work brings a joy that you can’t buy or package. It fills you from tip of toe to top of head. It’s the reason I get up and head out to work eagerly and with a lot of fire.”

Dionne Grayman
Morningside Staff Developer



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I have always believed that teachers go into the profession for the best reasons – to make their best contribution to children’s lives and to society – but that they often end up in an endless and unrewarding struggle over “classroom management.” And that power struggle, as we know, can lead to punitive discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline. I’ve been gratified to see so many educators hungry for new strategies and tools that move us away from that old model – including using restorative practices in their classrooms.

What do you wish everyone knew about our work?

I wish everyone had the opportunity to see our staff and staff developers in action. These are some of the most talented and thoughtful educators I’ve seen in my over 30-year career in education. Our approach to educational equity is putting the adults and students in the school building at the center of change. And that is incredibly challenging work, because the profound needs of educators and young people are not always aligned. I have witnessed how our staff work to bring adults and students together

as a community, and it is both powerful and joyous to watch. But it’s not easy. This work cannot be done in a one-off workshop. At its core, the work we do is about creating a classroom community, a place where everyone is valued – because that’s where teaching and learning can happen. And that’s something I wish more teachers, principals, education department leaders, and elected officials could see in action.

What excites you about what’s happening in education right now, including in NYC public schools? Is there promise in this moment?

What I think is promising about this moment we’re in right now, especially in New York City under the leadership of Chancellor Carranza, is that we’re really grappling with what we mean by educational equity. I think it’s exciting that we are finally examining the enormous structural issues we face and what to do about them. I’m talking about things like school integration, how we achieve equitable school funding, high-quality early education opportunities, and what a culturally responsive

curriculum looks like. That’s powerful.

Another aspect of the current moment that I find exciting is the growing support for bringing joy and play back into education. I have been alarmed for some time now about how all the fun has been sucked out of education because of the exclusive focus on “standards” and testing. If we want young learners to develop a deep love of learning, we’ve got to let them play! When I think about schools where laughing in class can get you suspended, it breaks my heart. So, I am all for deep learning and academic attainment, but I don’t think our culture of testing will get us there.

How can Morningside Center help realize the promise of this moment? What is our unique contribution?

I think Morningside is in a very unusual position at this moment. First, over the years we’ve developed a powerful combination of approaches that we can deliver through engaging workshops and skillful coaching – approaches that interweave social emotional learning, restorative practices,

and courageous conversations about race. Taken together, these strategies can create the space that young people need to feel safe, to belong, to have a voice – and to be able to thrive in school, socially and academically. Schools and school districts are now realizing that this is the kind of connection and community they need to build, and Morningside Center has a key set of tools for doing it.

Second, Morningside has very strong relationships with the Department of Education and other city agencies, and with teachers and school leaders. Having the support of these powerful stakeholders is key. Morningside is poised to bring these strategies to even more schools in the future, including to school systems beyond New York City.

Third, Morningside Center brings to the work a deep vision of social justice. Our work is part of the larger effort to build a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world. At this moment in history, we all need to see ourselves as part of that wider movement, to feel hopeful and connected, and make our best contribution.

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A new vision of school

Tala Manassah on what we're learning through i3

In late 2016, Morningside Center was awarded a federal Investing in Innovation (i3) grant to support a 4-year Whole School Racial Equity Project aimed at ending racial disparities in discipline and improving outcomes for students of color.

Our thesis: by interweaving social and emotional learning (SEL), restorative practices, and courageous conversations about race among adults, schools can address the underlying causes of disproportionate targeting of students of color for harsh discipline. Through the grant – and supporting funds from the Einhorn Family Charitable Trust, NY Community Trust, Trinity Wall Street, and Keith & Miller Foundation—we are developing, implementing, and testing this strategy for dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline.

More than two years on, we have completed Phase One of the project (development of the model in three NYC public schools) and Phase Two is well underway. In Phase Two, we are partnering with nine Brooklyn schools to implement our program. Researchers from Rutgers University are measuring the impact of our intervention relative to nine control schools as part of a gold-standard, randomized control trial study.

Below, Morningside Center Deputy Executive Director Tala Manassah, who directs the Whole School Racial Equity Project, reflects on some of the big ideas that have emerged so far from this bold effort.

Through the i3 project we have been wrestling with one of the most urgent and pressing issues in education today: racial disproportionality in school discipline. Black and brown students are two to three times more likely than their white peers to be harshly punished for the same minor disciplinary infractions at school. This has a direct bearing on the racial achievement gap, on school pushout and, ultimately, on involvement in the criminal (in)justice system. We have developed an innovative model integrating social and emotional learning (SEL), restorative practices, and courageous conversations about race that we believe will make a ground-breaking intervention into this pernicious problem.

The Whole School Racial Equity Project has provided us a richly resourced platform to ask and answer questions about what an equitable school looks like, and then to enact the strategies and interventions that move schools in that direction. While addressing the problem of racial disproportionality in school discipline, an undoubtedly huge undertaking, we have gained

crucial insight into what is required to produce schools that co-power the sense of voice, sense of worth, and sense of purpose that young people need to thrive.

And so today I believe we must go even further and ask ourselves: what does the liberatory school look like? The Whole School Racial Equity Project has illuminated some of the essential components. Here, I will outline three of them.

Reimagining Social & Emotional Learning

In the course of this incredible collective journey, we have realized that while tackling the noxious school-to-prison pipeline requires harnessing the transformative potential of social and emotional learning, SEL itself has a race problem. SEL has often been understood to be value-neutral, and yet social and emotional learning skills, in and of themselves, can either be used to promote a more equitable version of the world, or to reinforce a deeply inequitable version of the world. Many of the



Tala Manassah (front, fourth from left) with nine i3 principals, superintendents' liaisons, and research team.

skills that are prioritized or emphasized in the field assume a white normative lens that simply is not the lived experience of many of our students.

So the question becomes, how do we reformulate SEL so that it is culturally responsive and inclusive? How can we make sure that we are not only holding space for a white, middle-class, straight normative lens in our classrooms? SEL itself needs to be reexamined and redefined to solve this problem.

For example, in our racist society, do we really want to argue that in a submissive/assertive/aggressive behavior continuum, assertiveness is always the ideal sweet-spot of behavior? That advice could lead to dangerous outcomes for a child of color in far too many scenarios.

What about a student who comes from a cultural context where establishing eye contact with elders is considered a sign of disrespect? Do we want to tell that student that eye contact is always an important part of active listening? What implicit

messages are we giving the young person about their cultural heritage by insisting on that?

How about the value placed on “self management” or “managing feelings” in a traditional SEL definition? Do we really want to ask young people who are rightfully angry or resentful or sad about the world around them to “manage” those feelings? A culturally competent reimagining of SEL would suggest that the more effective approach would be: acknowledging those feelings as both legitimate and rational responses, allying with young people to support them in coping with present circumstances and building the skills they need to effectively self-advocate, and then working together to change the material conditions that produced the feelings in the first place.

An equity and liberation minded version of SEL must encourage and equip young people to have an agile facility with a range of options, and the skills required to make the best choice they can to ensure their own survival and thriving in any given moment.

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An equity and liberation minded version of SEL honors and elevates different cultural norms, and seeks to explore those with curiosity, humility, and an asset-based perspective.

Teachers need support to develop the ability to recognize, accept, embrace, and celebrate cultural difference – and they need the skills and cultural competence required to help our students navigate the complex code-switching and toggling that is required for success in our society.

Challenging Scarcity Mentality

One of our most urgent tasks as educators is to shift from a scarcity mentality to an abundance mentality. Scarcity mentality is a paradigm of the world that says that there are limited resources and we are in a zero-sum game to compete for them. This includes material things, but also things like recognition, credit, and power. We have an education

system that is largely based on competition rather than cooperation, on a funding structure that benefits those who already have resources, thus creating a system that perpetuates inequality, and on a standard curriculum that amplifies the so-called status quo and thus renders a huge portion of our collective history and experience invisible. An abundance paradigm, on the other hand, proposes the opposite: there is enough to go around and that everyone benefits when justice, resources, visibility, and love are shared.

Making a shift from a scarcity mentality to an abundance mentality is a serious challenge in the context of New York City public schools, which are routinely under-resourced. Children are coming with a lot of vulnerabilities that are produced by the inequities in society. Schools alone cannot make up for injustice that exists outside of school, but schools do have the capacity to have a tremendous impact on childrens’ lives. If we think about the

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Thank you,
Tom Roderick,
for 36 years
of wonderful
leadership!



school as its own ecosystem, we can and we must try to make it an abundant and healthy ecosystem for everybody in it, rather than a place that replicates systems of trauma and inequality. In order to do that, we must challenge the idea that our prospects are limited – that we can only aim so high or do so much.

In a liberatory school, systems and structures are intentionally put in place to facilitate the shift to an abundance mentality. For example: adults have consistent opportunities to develop collaborative and collegial relationships with each other, families are welcomed as partners in the healthy and holistic stewardship of our young people, positive outcomes (no matter how seemingly small) are routinely made visible and celebrated, and perhaps most challenging given systemic pressures: challenges and failures are seen as opportunities for collective growth and learning rather than individual shame or blame.

Freedom to Fail and Embrace Imperfection

One of the ways that conversations about race are silenced is through what Voltaire called the “best being the enemy of good.” If we wait for perfect conditions to tackle racism in schools, we have established a locked paradox through which the conversation and correlated action will never happen.

The liberatory school takes risks and makes mistakes as a part of a lived commitment to constant improvement. The liberatory school is guided by the ethos that every problem, if dealt with openly and creatively and with a warm heart, can be solved. Liberatory schools can take big risks and fail quickly and fix quickly. Liberatory schools that are informed by a restorative mindset take it as a given that human beings are both prone to mistakes and capable of magnificence.

Therefore, the liberatory school recognizes that when adults 1) demonstrate the courage to name and face difficult issues 2) demonstrate a capacity for innovative risk-taking 3) demonstrate a willingness to openly acknowledge mistakes 4) demonstrate the flexibility to find alternative potential solutions and 5) demonstrate that this process can yield positive forward motion for all, we are modeling the kind of world we want our young people to intimately know is possible. By actively engaging student voices in this culture, we have the potential to create a world in which young people become adults who have the experience and expertise to take these principles far beyond the school doors and toward being the architects of a world that is more participatory, equitable, just, and joyful for all.

Tala Manassah

Our staff

Cassie Schwerner, Executive Director
 Tala Manassah, Deputy Executive Director
 Sara Carrero, Communications Associate
 Lillian Castro, Director of Operations
 Daniel Coles, Senior Program Manager
 Katrena Dennard, Controller
 Leslie Dennis, Materials Manager
 Sully Diaz, Program Director, PAZ @ PS 24
 Larry Garvin, Chief Financial Officer
 Yaritza Hernandez, PAZ Program Manager
 Bryanna Kolja, Program Director, PAZ Middle School @ PS 214
 Doris Lo, Program Associate
 Ann Mathews, Human Resources Director
 Laura McClure, Fundraising & Communications Director
 Joseph Yabyabin, Human Resources Assistant
 Cesar Zuzunaga Jr., Staff Accountant

Our staff developers

Eugenia Acuña
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 Mariana Gaston
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 Janice Marie Johnson
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 Ife Lenard
 Lauren Neidhardt
 Angela Polite
 Jenny Seaquist
 Laurine Towler
 Marieke van Woerkom
 Nabil Vinas
 Elizabeth Miu-Lan Young
 Marisa Zalabak



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Who did we reach in 2018?



Operating budget FY 2018

Budget:

NYC Department of Education	1,389,408
After-School Programs	1,535,794
Federal Contracts	577,573
Other Contracts	225,470
Foundations & Corporations	1,144,610
Learning Kits Orders & Other	404,209

Total Revenue: 5,277,065

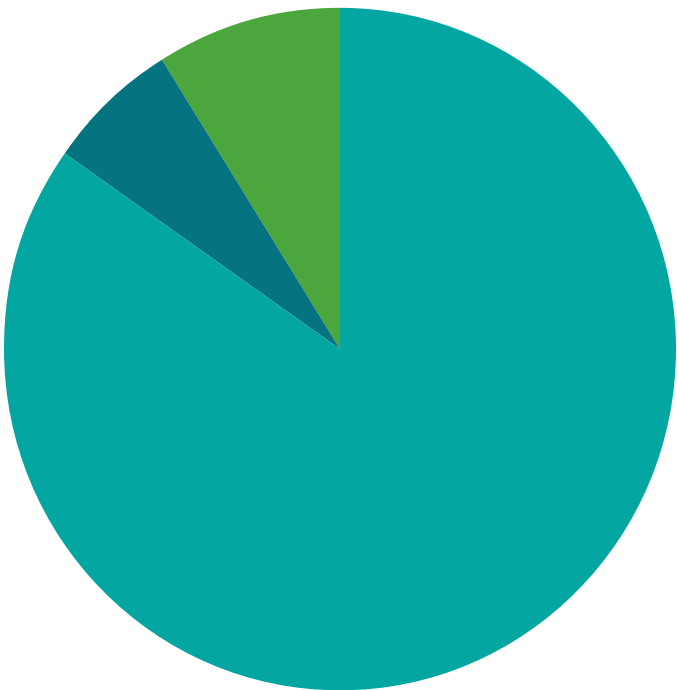


Expenses:

Personnel Services	4,093,732
Direct Program Expenses OTPS	308,573
General & Administrative OTPS	423,437

Total Expenses: 4,825,742

Surplus: 451,323





Thank you, **Board of Directors!**

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Some of Morningside Center's staff.

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