



# Annual Report 2021

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility

## A message from executive director Cassie Schwerner

# We need to put community and healing first – especially now

When schools reopened this past fall, many people called for a single-minded focus on boosting students' academic learning to overcome "Covid learning loss." But at Morningside, we knew that unless we focused on students' social and emotional well-being, students' academic performance would continue to worsen.

After two years of a pandemic that has been extremely challenging for students, teachers, and families, we are working with schools to address the pain and trauma that isolation, dislocation, and loss of loved ones has caused. Because beyond the learning loss that we can be sure students have experienced, this trauma, left unaddressed, will continue to deepen academic setbacks even as schools get back to "normal."

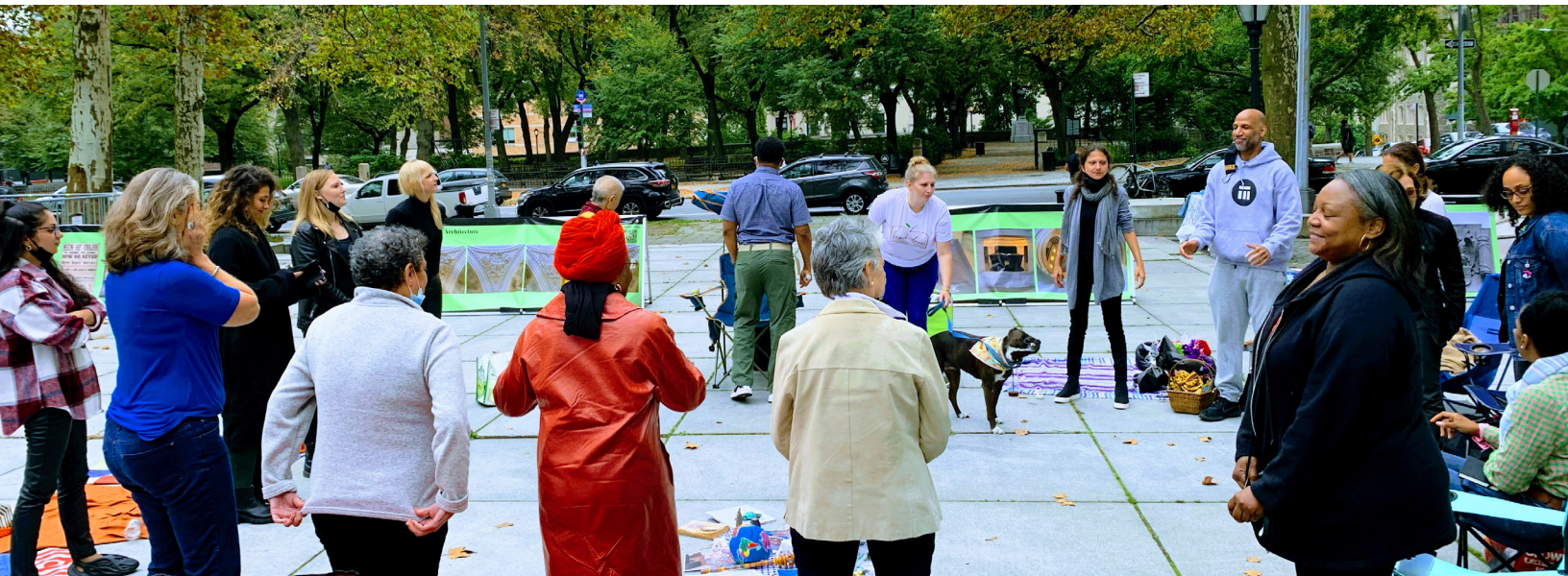
Brain science and other research in the field of social and emotional learning tells us that students can't learn when they don't feel safe, when they feel disconnected, when they are experiencing unaddressed grief, loss, anxiety,



and distress. (See Zaretta Hammond's *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*.)

As child psychologist Jacob Ham explains, it's extremely difficult for children to learn when they feel unsafe or under threat in any way ("survival brain"). But if they feel supported and connected,

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Top: Cassie with Daniel Coles and Tala Manassah. Above: Staff/staff developer retreat in Riverside Park in the fall.

# Morningside's progress in 2021

2021 presented plenty of challenges for educators, students, families – and us. But we were grateful to be able to support schools in need. Here are some of our accomplishments.

- ◆ **DEMAND:** This school year, we have experienced an unprecedented level of demand from schools. We were able to help hundreds of schools address the stress, uncertainty, dislocation, and loss that students and staff are experiencing.
- ◆ **REACH:** So far in the 2021-22 school year, our team has already delivered our 5- to 7-day training/coaching for some 200 schools, promoting a sense of connection and belonging through social and emotional learning, restorative approaches, and culturally affirming practices.
- ◆ **IMPACT:** “Creating this welcoming space of feeling safe, feeling heard and seen at school... that has been powerful,” said one principal, describing the impact of our work at his school in Washington Heights. We continue our longstanding partnership with researchers to measure our impact and learn from our experience.
- ◆ **EXPANSION:** In addition to working in schools across New York City, we expanded our work in two districts in upstate New York as well as in Philadelphia. We hired an additional five staff developers to handle our growth.
- ◆ **RESOURCES:** We shared free resources worldwide on TeachableMoment, posting 56 new lessons over the past year. The number of website users has jumped 50% since 2019, with over 800k pageviews this year. Our 9/11 Teaching Guide received tens of thousands of hits, and we shared our approaches for teaching on 9/11 and other challenging

subjects in interviews on NPR and NY1. We also released a new animated video that gives people a glimpse of what Morningside's magic looks like in schools.

- ◆ **IMPROVEMENTS:** We made our extensive preK-12 curricula available online to educators in our programs, and are updating and enriching all our curricula with additional activities to promote culturally responsive classrooms, reduce stress, and bring joy.
- ◆ **HONORS:** We ended 2021 with the happy news that we were a finalist for the Brooklyn Community Foundation's Spark Prize, which goes to organizations that have demonstrated a commitment to equity and racial justice, as well as “strong institutional values and a dynamic vision for the future of their organization.”
- ◆ **GRATITUDE:** Thank you for being part of our Morningside community and for making this work possible!



# My teachers needed tools to address the racism I faced in school

*Morningside colleague **Doris Lo** writes on the microaggressions she experienced as a child, and why teachers must learn how to confront racism.*

There were two things that made me want to become a teacher.

First, it was the love of school – I was lucky to have had many caring teachers who instilled in me self-confidence and the love of learning.

Second, it was the realization that while school prepared me for many things, it unfortunately did not prepare me for the hardest lessons in my life. I wanted to become a teacher to help children today navigate the same lessons I navigated on my own.

My identity as an Asian American meant that I, like so many people of color, endured racism from my earliest years. There are many rewards to a good academic education, but systemic racism inevitably erodes them away. It undoes the hard work of well-meaning educators.

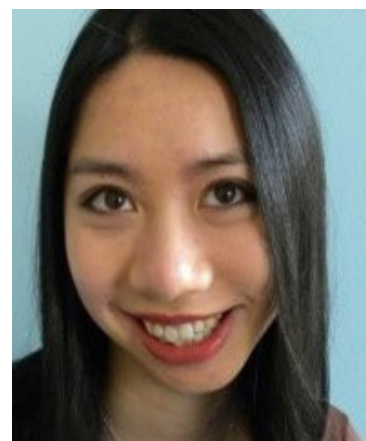
I never doubted that my teachers cared about me. They spoke positively of me and expected me to do well. I relished every sticker, every star, every compliment, and every good mark.

Even when I was caught passing notes in class in 4th grade, my teacher was disappointed and stern with me, but never in a way that conveyed she stopped caring about me. I am lucky to have had these positive experiences that built my self-confidence. Whether I was unconsciously viewed as a “model minority” or not, I know I benefit from the care of my teachers.

The irony is that while my well-intentioned teachers poured their efforts into creating affirming classroom experiences, they also missed

the kinds of interactions that regularly chipped away at my spirit. Their “colorblindness” meant they were blind to the racism that I saw clearly. These were comments like, “Eww, Chinese people are gross. They eat chicken feet.” and “Ching chong ching chong!” Or the seemingly benign statements like “You’re so quiet” and “Where are you from?” – which are in fact microaggressions.

I wish I could have told my teachers about these, but children don’t have the words to talk about racism until they’re taught them. And even if I had the words, by then, racism was already winning. I felt too small to speak up.



On field trips, my mom would pack me a fried egg, over easy, drizzled with soy sauce, sandwiched between two slices of white bread. It was simple and incredibly delicious. When you bit into it, the creamy egg yolk mixed delectably with the salty soy sauce-soaked bread. I loved it, but I hated eating it in front of my classmates. This delicious sandwich was a source of embarrassment.

School is a place where curiosity is encouraged, yet, so often, students are not taught to be curious about people they don’t know about. Harmful comments are exchanged every day because children assume that just because something is different, it is wrong.

By the time I was in 4th grade, I had internalized the stereotypes and racist messages about Asians, and specifically, Chinese people –

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messages like Chinese people eat disgusting foods. I was afraid to eat my sandwich because I feared my classmates would see it as gross and weird, when in fact it was just different, and they might have found it delicious if they tried it.

Because racism is systemic, it isn't just experienced once in a person's life; it is experienced regularly throughout a lifetime and can lead a person to be ashamed of who they are. I was ashamed of my Chinese identity and did what many people do with something they're ashamed of – I disconnected from it. This is internalized racism. Until I confronted it, it was as if I was living two separate lives – the life that was "American" and the life that I kept hidden from view that included everything from what I spoke at

home to how and what I ate.

But the reality was, no matter how much I ran from it internally, when people see me, they see an Asian woman.

I believe that giving tools to children to confront racism is as important as personally refraining from racist behaviors. We know that as early as three months of age, children are already paying attention to people who don't look like their parents or other caregivers.

It is never too early to give children the tools to understand the world they are growing up in.

–Doris Lo



# A Little Teapot: Lessons in Self-Care

Morningside Staff Developer **Dionne Grayman** writes about self-care for her blog series, See and Be Seen.

I remember being younger, a little person, probably in Pre-K, and singing this song:

*"I'm a little teapot, short and stout  
Here is my handle, here is my spout  
When I get all steamed up, hear me shout  
Just tip me over and pour me out!"*

I'm sure – or at least I'm hoping – that this had some connection to whatever the term for "social and emotional learning" was back then. Because today, in my adult mind, the image of a teapot and steam is pointing me towards the critical importance of self-care.

I know, I know. It has become one of those THINGS that everybody is "doing." And as THE THING to do, it may also be generating guilt and shame if you are someone who is unclear or unsure about self-care, or believes that it isn't for you. You won't ask about this, of course, because then somebody will know you don't know – and as an educator, not knowing something is a cardinal sin.



My first offering to you is to be gentle with yourself and give yourself "grace" (yet another term that some folks are struggling with because IT has also become a thing). Simply, don't beat yourself up for messing up, missing a step, not knowing everything. Those self-talk strategies that you've been sharing with your students also apply to you.



My second offering goes back to the teapot. Before the pandemic shutdown, I had a conversation with a woman who was talking to me about the state of depletion. She had me imagine that I was holding a teacup and saucer (old school). She said that whatever was in the teacup was for me and me alone and whatever spilled over into the saucer was what I had to share with others. She called that abundance. If the saucer was empty and I had to pour into others from my cup, that was depletion.

I had been in the habit of pouring into others from the cup because I wasn't even aware that I should have had a saucer in the first place. See, I thought self-care was about candles and Epsom salt baths and exercise and sleep and staying hydrated and saying no. And, honestly, none of that was happening consistently. (Say no???)

Feeling depleted was my normal, my default operating system. But because I was constantly pouring into others from my cup as a demonstration of love, care, commitment, responsibility, and obligation, I thought I was doing something, doing "the work." Until that woman told me I was acting from a place of depletion and doing so was not the

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demonstration of love, care, commitment, responsibility, and obligation that I thought. I know, right? We're just going to pause right here. Take some breaths.

Friend, that breath was self-care. Self-care is simply giving yourself what you need so that you can pour into others from the saucer, not the cup. Sometimes it's a breath, it's a candle, it's a call with a someone who makes you smile. It's a hug, a plant, a pet. It's turning off notifications, it's walking outside with a colleague or your team for a meeting.

It's setting boundaries and saying no when your gut tells you to say no even as your mind is trying to put it all together (I see you!). It's taking a nap, watching "Big City Greens" or listening to Beyonce as you commute because Beyonce is always the right answer. It's reconnecting to play and remembering the things that give you joy.

I have a coloring book, crayons, colored pencils, and a set of old school metal jacks with the pink rubber ball that my cousin the trucker found at a truck stop out west somewhere. If your only ref-

erence to jacks are the multi-colored plastic ones, you were cheated as a child and you have my sympathy. It's the songs we learned in kindergarten, at camp, on the block, or house of worship. Sing them wrong and strong if you must, but sing them.

Since August, I have been reading heartbreaking posts on Teacher Twitter about feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, burnout, and depletion – and it's just September. Schools here in New York City just reopened; the largest and last system in the country to so do. And two teachers I know personally quit on the first day.

We are in crisis, period. And yet, we are also in a place of great opportunity. We can transform. We can be practical and radical in our need for healing, for connection, for the unlimited possibilities of what we could and should become. I see you and want to be seen by you as someone who is here to support you from a place of abundance.

This is the first time I've written since May 2020 and it is giving me much joy. Thank you.

**– Dionne Grayman**



Staff share a smile on Zoom.

## **We need to put community and healing first** (continued from page 2)

they enter into what he calls “learning brain,” when they can be calm, even playful – and open to new ideas and learning.

The trauma and academic setbacks are greatest among students who have been most devastated by the inequitable impact of the pandemic, including Black and Brown students and those from low-income families. Of course, this inequity was already in place long before the pandemic. I was Jonathan Kozol’s research assistant when he published *Savage Inequalities* back in 1991. After three decades of “ed reform,” the savage inequalities remain – and they have deepened during this pandemic.

Students of color, in particular Black and Indigenous students, are facing a preexisting pandemic dating back to 1619 and earlier: racism. At Morningside Center, we work to create caring and inclusive classrooms where young people can share their experiences through empathetic connections. This includes unpacking racism and other ‘isms’ of the world. Young learners deserve honest discussion about our nation’s history, which we all have inherited. That includes the history of enslavement, Jim Crow, colonialism, racism, sexism, and other systemic injustices and inequities – and how they have impacted our nation and continue to shape it today. While these conversations can sometimes be uncomfortable, we often need to lean into discomfort in order to learn and grow – and create genuinely inclusive and caring communities.

To address and heal from the trauma of Covid – and of racism – we are supporting schools to take what Dr. Shawn Ginwright calls a “healing-centered approach.” Rather than viewing trauma as an isolated experience that happens to an individual, a healing-centered approach highlights how trauma and healing are experienced collectively. A healing-centered approach is holistic. It involves culture, our collective spirit, and our collective well-being, including working together to address harms and make positive change.

An important ingredient in healing-centered engagement is acknowledging the harm and injury, but not being defined by it. If our approach is to focus solely on students’ ongoing crisis management, we make it difficult for them to see beyond the present. Perhaps one of the greatest tools available to us is the ability to see past the condition, event, or situation that caused the trauma in the first place. Research shows that the ability to dream and imagine is an important factor in fostering hopefulness and optimism – both of which contribute to overall well-being.

All this applies to our youngest students as well as older ones. So much of their learning happens through collaborative play, art, and storytelling – interactions that Covid made so difficult.

Throughout 2021, our team of staff developers has provided training, coaching, and materials to support tens of thousands of educators and students in prioritizing community and connection in classrooms and school-wide. We are working to give students time to stop, reflect, heal, and reconnect – and, as Ginwright suggests, to dream and imagine.

School needs to be a place where we feel sad together, celebrate and play together, and envision a better future together. My experience tells me that not only will this be key to students’ academic success, but it will bring joy and creativity to their lives, and ours.

– **Cassie Schwerner**





# Honoring Emma Gonzalez

It is with very heavy hearts that we share the news that our beloved colleague Emma Gonzalez passed away on July 28. Emma, a gifted educator, thinker, and artist, helped to steer Morningside Center's course for over 35 years.

Emma's impact on our organization cannot be overstated. She was among the first staff to be hired at Morningside, and for a time she was our Associate Director. Throughout her decades at Morningside, she was a treasured trainer, coach, and mentor. Most recently, she served as a dedicated board member.

From the very beginning until her last days, Emma was a persistent and passionate advocate for putting student voice and equity at the center of our work. She was endlessly inventive, and took her lead from young people themselves. She co-created with students our Peace Helpers and Diversity Panels programs. (To get a glimpse of these remarkable projects, see videos about Peace Helpers and Diversity Panels on our website.)

For many years, she partnered with Brooklyn's PS 24 to help make that school a showcase for what is possible in education when we attend to every child's capacity to create, to collaborate, and to lead.

Emma greatly influenced Morningside as we deepened our focus on racial justice. She was relentless in her efforts to ensure that our curricula and programs reflect and honor the cultural and linguistic diversity of our students and their families.

Emma was skilled in facilitating difficult conversations and in creating a welcoming and supportive place for such important exchanges to happen. She was a gifted practitioner of conflict resolution and mediation, and enabled many young people to become gifted practitioners of these skills as well.

Emma Gonzalez will always be with us.



# Operating Budget FY 2021

## Budget:

|                               |           |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| NYC Department of Education   | 1,503,269 |
| After-School Programs         | 1,015,830 |
| Federal Contracts             | 354,931   |
| Other Contracts               | 415,785   |
| Foundations & Corporations    | 996,838   |
| Individual Donations          | 66,332    |
| Learning Kits & Other Revenue | 16,910    |

**Total Revenue:** 4,369,894

## Expenses:

|                               |                  |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Personnel Services            | 3,571,270        |
| Direct Program Expenses       | 240,644          |
| General & Administrative OTPS | 382,829          |
| <b>Total Expenses:</b>        | <b>4,194,743</b> |
| <b>Surplus:</b>               | <b>175,151</b>   |

## Best Wishes to Leslie, Larry, & Doris!



We send our gratitude and warmest wishes to three beloved co-workers who left our team in 2021. We miss them deeply – but are pleased and thankful that all three continue to be active members of our Morningside community!

Larry Garvin, Morningside’s financial leader for decades, has been a long-sighted and principled guide who has helped steer our organization’s growth almost since its founding.

Leslie Dennis, our curriculum maven, artistic muse, and Office Mom since 1998, has brought warmth, humor, kindness, and endless energy for getting the job done.



Doris Lo has contributed her deep competence and creativity to managing our contracts and expanding our after-school work – always with passion and dedication.

*Top: Doris Lo and Leslie Dennis. Bottom: Larry Garvin and Paula Heredia*

# Morningside's Reach in 2021

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- Provided on-site coaching in **152** schools
- Provided training for **1,286** NYC educators
- Trained educators from **331** NYC schools
- Reached an estimated **19,000** students

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- Served **89** after-school programs
- Trained **840** after-school staff
- Reached an estimated **21,000** after-school students



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- 85%** increase in website pageviews in the past two years
- 34%** increase in newsletter subscribers in the past two years

## Our staff

Sara Carrero, Communications Associate  
Daniel Coles, Senior Program Manager  
Sully Diaz, Director of Program Operations  
Katrena Dennard, Director of Finance  
Lilith Hedrington, Payroll Specialist  
Yaritzza Hernandez, Contracts Manager  
Bryanna Kolja, Afterschool Supervisor/Program Coordinator  
Jillian Luft, Curriculum Writer & Editor  
Ife Lenard, Manager of Special Projects  
Tala Manassah, Deputy Executive Director  
Ann Mathews, Human Resources Director  
Laura McClure, Fundraising/Communications Director  
Marisol Mendez, PAZ Program Director  
Edgardo Rivera, Senior Director of Operations and Finance  
Demetria Robinson, Program and Operations Associate  
Cassie Schwerner, Executive Director  
Cecilia Xu, Finance Assistant  
Joseph Yabyabin, Human Resources Assistant

## Our staff developers

|                       |                              |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Eugenia Acuna         | Adriana Guzman               |
| Mamzelle Adolphine    | Janice Marie Johnson         |
| Lili Arkin            | Iris Laurencio               |
| Jonah Braverman       | Mariel Lemair                |
| Victoria Cheng-Gorini | Ileana Mendez Penate         |
| Ava Daniel            | Lauren Neidhardt             |
| Javier Francisco Diaz | Angela Polite                |
| Tresa Elguera         | DaRon Ross                   |
| Nelly Espina          | Jenny Seaquist               |
| Amy Fabrikant         | Nicole Lavonne Smith-Johnson |
| Emily Feinstein       | Laurine Towler               |
| Ellen Ferrin          | Marieke van Woerkom          |
| Mariana Gaston        | Nabil Vinas                  |
| Makeda Gershenson     | Marisa Zalabak               |
| Dionne Grayman        |                              |



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Joyce Dudley  
Luther Flurry, Vice Chair  
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Robert Kim  
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## Thank you, foundation friends!

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**Morningside Center**  
for Teaching Social Responsibility  
475 Riverside Drive, Suite 550  
New York, NY 10115

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