



2019 - 2020 IMPACT REPORT

THE NORA PROJECT





FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In the years we've been tracking impact data, themes have begun to emerge. For example, we've noticed year-over-year that our students' cognitive, affective, and prosocial empathy scores improve across demographics. We've also noticed an overwhelming number of participants report making new friends, and that they believe those friendships will last. Notably, we've observed students' primary concern has shifted from "me" to "we," as by-and-large they prioritize caring for others above their own personal success and happiness--an altruism marker identified by the Making Caring Common group at Harvard in 2014.

Sudden school closures, mandatory quarantine, unfamiliar masking and social distancing rules, extended uncertainty and confusion about the state of the world and what and who are safe--these factors took a toll.

As Nora Project Leadership Council member Dr. Michele Borba observed in her bestselling book *UnSelfie*,

"As anxiety increases, empathy wanes: it's hard to feel for others when you're in 'survival mode.'"

After taking a step back, it became clear that our data indicates an urgent need for opportunities to engage students in learning that helps manage their anxiety and gives them opportunities to connect with others.

The pandemic has caused all of us great concern, and children have been impacted as much or more than adults.

Without such opportunities, the decline in empathy and rise in narcissism, bullying, and depression that has plagued our children over the last several decades will likely continue. Indeed, these opportunities may be more important now than ever before, as in deciding what to teach with limited time and resources, we risk compounding students' pandemic trauma by ignoring the learning they need most.

“

“This data indicates an urgent need for opportunities to engage students in learning that helps manage their anxiety and overwhelm and that gives them opportunities to connect with others and flex their empathy muscles.

In fact, these opportunities may be more important now than ever before, as in deciding what to teach with limited time and resources, we risk compounding students’ pandemic trauma by ignoring the learning they need most.”

- Lauren Schrero, Executive Director

”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2019-2020 school year was unlike any other since The Nora Project began. First, the organization debuted its “Lifecycle Program Suite,” including a brand-new program for preschoolers and early elementary students--the Primer Pack--as well as a middle school and high school program--the STEMpathy Club. In addition to launching these programs, The Nora Project tested a new, co-taught version of its flagship program, the Storyteller Project. A rigorous impact study design was developed to capture outcomes for all three programs.

However, school closures in March due to the Covid-19 Pandemic made data collection difficult. No post-program student data was collected for the Primer Pack since our teachers were not able to observe their students in the classroom setting past March, and not all of the extracurricular STEMpathy Clubs were able to complete their work. While a great deal of post-project Storyteller data was captured, as the majority of classrooms were able to continue the work remotely, the results were difficult to analyze given the state of the world at the time the data was collected.

Therefore, it is the purpose of this report to highlight how the data collected suggests each of the programs is contributing to the dual goals of the organization: teaching empathy and sparking friendships between students and their peers with disabilities.

KEY IMPACT REPORT FINDINGS

THE NORA PROJECT

ABOUT

Co-founded by an educator and the parents of a child with disabilities, **The Nora Project** aims to normalize difference, demystify disability, and promote meaningful connections between students and their peers with disabilities. We do this through a suite of programs that teach empathy, inclusive beliefs and behaviors, disability awareness, storytelling, accessibility and innovation, and advocacy.

Learn more about The Nora Project at www.thenoraproject.ngo.

98%

of Primer Pack teachers reported their students demonstrating an ability to show empathy toward peers in the classroom.

91%

of Storyteller Project teachers reported positive impacts on classroom culture.

100%

of STEMpathy teachers reported student generated innovative solutions to barriers to inclusion at their schools.





PRIMER PACK

Preschool and early elementary students

The Primer Pack offers students in preschool through third grade weekly lessons in emotional literacy, friendship skills, empathy, and disability awareness.



STORYTELLER PROJECT

Intermediate elementary students

A year-long project that brings students together to learn about each other, nurture friendships, and develop an Ability Inclusive Mindset.



STEMPATHY CLUB

Middle and high school students

The STEMpathy Club invites students to examine their school through a lens of inclusion and to identify and carry out projects that make it more inclusive.

PRIMER PACK

Teachers overwhelmingly agreed that the Primer Pack Program had a positive impact on their students.



98%

of Primer Pack teachers reported their students demonstrating an ability to show empathy toward peers in the classroom.

95%

of teachers say my students demonstrate greater empathy towards their peers of all abilities during recess.

90%

of teachers say their students demonstrate greater empathy towards their peers of all abilities during recess.

“

There was a child who was being bullied in first grade because he speaks with a stutter. There were a few kids being particularly mean and relentless and yesterday three of my students, all boys who have grown significantly during the course of these lessons, stood up for the 1st grader and told the kids to stop.

Coming from cool 2nd graders, it really impacted them. They also responsibly reported the behavior.

Then today the three boys all waited for the first grader outside his classroom so that they could escort him out to recess and play with him.

- Primer Pack Teacher

”

STORYTELLER PROJECT

The Nora Project Storyteller Program increased students empathy when comparing pre to post-program scores.



89%

of teachers reported their students developed meaning mixed ability friendships.

91%

of teachers shared some type of positive impact on classroom culture as a result of participating in Storyteller Project.

80%

of teachers reported that their students demonstrated greater empathy to all peers, even outside the classroom.



“

“I believe that the students are learning to listen to other's stories of who they are, what they think; and in doing so, students are feeling empowered to be more transparent because they trust they will be accepted for who they are.”

- SY 19-20 Storyteller Project Teacher

”

STORYTELLER PROJECT

Additional Impact Study findings



While there were trends in positive empathy growth in both the original Storyteller program and the co-taught program, the co-taught program demonstrated better empathy outcomes.

Program findings show:

- Students in the co-taught program scored higher on all domains on the empathy assessment at the end of the program compared to the original program.
- Given the success of the co-taught pilot, The Nora Project is transitioning all Storyteller Programming to this inclusive model going forward.
- Research has shown that higher scores on all domains of the empathy assessment correlate to lower levels of bullying behavior and higher levels of friendship quality.

Trends seen in an individual classroom using the co-taught program bear this out, showing that **when empathy scores increase, behavioral incidences decrease.**

- Boys in the individual classroom made substantial gains in Affective Empathy, Cognitive Empathy and Prosocial Motivation, which bucks the national trend.
- Girls also made substantial gains in Cognitive Empathy.
- The teacher for this classroom shared that there were no disciplinary issues for the entire school year in this classroom—the only classroom for which that was true in the entire K-8 building.

STEMPATHY CLUB

Additional Impact Study findings



The STEMpathy Club creates space and time for students to foster friendships with their peers and to apply engineering design principles to create a more physically, culturally, and socially inclusive school environment. Students take a hard look at their school community through a variety of lenses and consider whether it is ability inclusive.

They identify potential problems and solutions, pitch their ideas to school officials, and ultimately carry out their vision for how to improve the inclusiveness of their school community.

WHAT TEACHERS ARE SAYING...

- All teachers responded that club members identified problems and generated solutions to create a more inclusive environment for people of all abilities either for the school community or the broader community in which the school is based.

WHAT STUDENTS ARE SAYING...

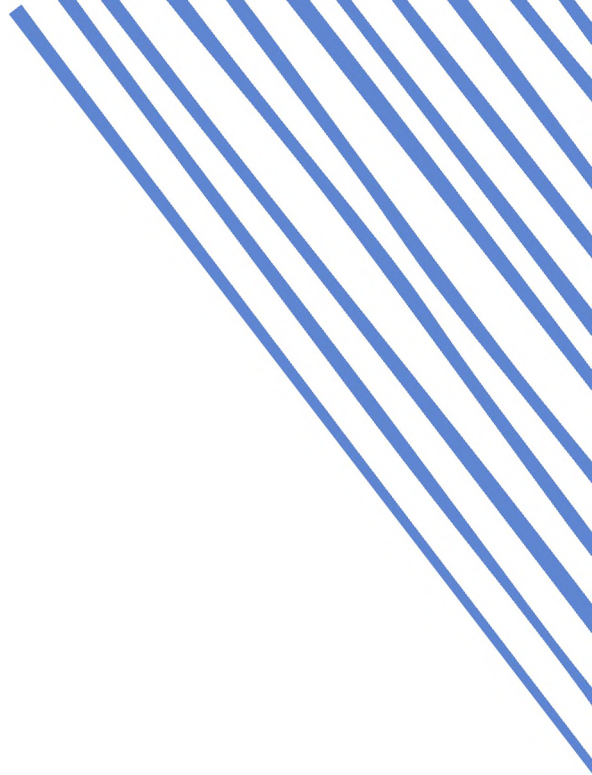
- Most students responded that they learned that their school or community had room for improvement when it came to inclusion.
- All students who responded to the survey felt that their club accomplished changing the school-wide culture positively.

“

“I think the club had great ideas to change people’s mindsets. Even though we did not get to accomplish everything we planned we still did things like interviewing people with disabilities and sharing our ideas to get different perspectives”

- SY 19-20 STEMPathy Club Student Member

”



Download the full Impact Report linked [here](#).



THE NORA PROJECT

...because everyone has a story.

The Nora Project

PO Box 664

Highland Park, IL 60035

www.TheNoraProject.ngo



@TheNoraProject