

2022
2023

SEL SCHOOLS PROGRAM IMPACT REPORT



OUR VISION

Through collaboration, all clients are effectively served no matter where they fall along the spectrum of need.



OUR MISSION

We aim to further the healthy development of youth, families, and community members by providing direct service, building capacity, and creating tangible systems change.



OUR HISTORY

Since 1985, we innovate and develop programming in response to community needs.



CLIENTS WE SERVE

We serve at-risk youth, adults and families experiencing the impact of poverty, trauma, mental health, and substance misuse in the greater Bridgeport region.

ABOUT RYASAP

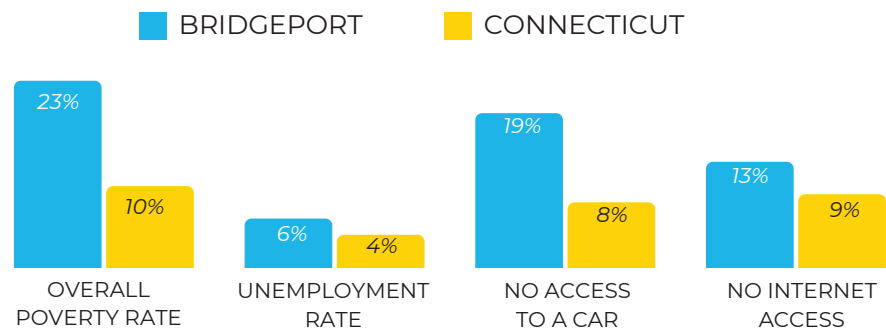
38 YEARS AS A FORCE FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE

Established in 1985, the **Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership** (RYASAP) is a change-maker for underserved and marginalized youth, families, and neighborhoods in the greater Bridgeport area. We have expertise from pre-K to adulthood in Restorative Practices, Youth Development, Mental Health and Substance Misuse Prevention, Social and Emotional Learning, and Advocacy, all under one roof. We develop, coordinate, and partner with other organizations to ensure comprehensive support for our clients and region. Our collaborative work ensures that we serve everyone in need, no matter where they are on their personal journey.

ABOUT BRIDGEPORT

HOW DOES BRIDGEPORT COMPARE TO CONNECTICUT?

Situated in Fairfield County, Bridgeport stands out from the rest of Connecticut. Neighboring cities, such as Stamford and Norwalk, have experienced greater economic growth. Bridgeport also faces significant obstacles as the state's largest city. Too many residents experience financial insecurity, violence, crime, health disparities, limited access to transportation, language barriers, and more. In many cases, Bridgeport's disparity gap is twice or more than the Connecticut average.



DAILY LIVING EXPENSES

UNDERSTANDING THE COST OF LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES

Multiple social, economic, and historical factors negatively affect Bridgeport. They hinder youth success in the city, including limited educational opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, and public services. Its schools are among the most underfunded in the state.² Moreover, like many urban areas, Bridgeport youth experience challenges regarding the cost of living. These hurdles include housing affordability, lack of transportation, unemployment, and even scarcity of basic needs such as food and childcare. Despite these challenges, the city has much to offer with its diverse population, thriving cultural organizations, and higher education institutions.

Bridgeport's median household income of **\$50,311**,⁴ less basic living expenses of **\$66,324**, leaves families short by **\$16,013**.⁵



RYASAP: ADVOCATE FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

In addition to our direct services, RYASAP partners with schools, community organizations, and other stakeholders. We advocate by connecting individuals to community resources. By working with policymakers and key community leaders, RYASAP can advocate for students and families, justice-involved youth, and healthier communities.

BASIC LIVING EXPENSES FOR A BRIDGEPORT FAMILY OF ONE ADULT AND TWO YOUNG CHILDREN³



CHILDCARE
\$24,512



HOUSING
\$21,870



FOOD
\$10,111



TRANSPORTATION
\$9,831

PROGRAM HISTORY

SUPPORTING STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS IN BRIDGEPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS



We work with students, faculty, school staff members, and parents to support students' emotional and mental health needs by expanding the use of additional Restorative Practices and by providing interventions and engagements with students. Goals include reducing chronic absenteeism, lowering school suspensions, and improving the school climate.

The **Social and Emotional (SEL) Schools** program grew out of the BPS SEL Initiative, which started in the 2012-2013 school year, spearheaded by Bridgeport Public Schools, the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC, a program of RYASAP), and the Tauck Family Foundation.

During the 2020-21 school year, Bridgeport Public Schools and RYASAP created a SEL focused PK-8 community

school at Luis Muñoz Marín School in response to the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to hybrid and in-person learning. That year, we also expanded our existing work at Harding High School. The program made critical strides in working with youth on violence prevention and conflict resolution. The following school year, Cesar A. Batalla School and Barnum School joined the SEL CS program.

We have expanded to a total of six schools, including Dunbar School in October 2022 and Bridgeport Military Academy in February 2023. We continue to expand the use of Restorative Practices district-wide by training and coaching teachers, administrative teams, and staff to support students' emotional and mental health needs.

KATHRYN SILVER, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL, HARDING HIGH SCHOOL

"[Harding] staff can lean on the social capital that has been built by embracing Restorative Practices, when issues arise... Problems become opportunities... Situations that otherwise might result in a student being removed from class present ways to teach that student how to repair the harm that was done and continue moving forward."



SEL SCHOOLS PROGRAM IMPACT

TOTAL STUDENTS SERVED

563

INCIDENTS RESPONDED TO

791

INCIDENTS SUCCESSFULLY RESOLVED

98%

HOURS SPENT WITH STUDENTS

1207

The SEL Schools Program expanded to include two additional schools. We met with the school administration to address their needs and challenges. As we onboarded at each school, we prioritized the medium to high-needs students.

The mental health and social and emotional needs of our Bridgeport students have been overwhelming. We saw a rise of over 360% in behavioral incidents from 74 last year to 286.

This was the first full year after the COVID-19 disruptions. The country experienced soaring mental health challenges during the pandemic.⁶ Recent studies show that young people continue to face mental health crises.⁷ The program's work is more critical than ever. We found an increased need for mental health support at all grade levels, but most importantly, in middle and high school.

This is our second full year in four schools. Staff have a better understanding of our role in the school community, which increased the number of incidents engaging our team. Across all six schools we serve, **95% of the students enrolled completed the program** with support from SEL Schools staff through Restorative Practice Interventions (RPIs).

THIS YEAR'S HIGHLIGHTS

ADVANCED RESTORATIVE PRACTICES TRAINING

SEL Schools staff completed an Advanced Restorative Practices training to gain new skills and knowledge. This allowed them to become Restorative Practices coaches at each of their schools. The strategies they learned help students, staff, and parents in the school community and neighborhoods succeed.



BEYOND BASKETBALL BRAWL

In January, the Bassick High School's boys' basketball team got into a significant altercation with New Haven's Wilbur Cross team. A few weeks later, SEL Schools staff helped facilitate a restorative circle that saw both teams, including players, coaches, and school officials, come together to learn more about each other and ways to avoid conflict going forward.

STEM EXPO AT HCC

RYASAP and several community partners held a STEM Expo in May at Housatonic Community College. The event brought together high school students from across the district interested in STEM. Featured activities included the University of Bridgeport's *STEM on Wheels* mobile laboratory, a "beat-making" workshop sponsored by Meta, and a tour of the Advanced Manufacturing Lab at HCC.



RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AT WORK

SEL Schools staff spent nearly **300 hours implementing Restorative Practices** across the six schools we serve. Each type of Restorative Practice Intervention (RPI) serves a specific purpose in resolving conflicts and promoting Restorative Practices. We saw a wide distribution of RPI types. For example, Harding relies heavily on Impromptu Conferences, while Barnum and Dunbar have a balanced mix of Mediation and Impromptu Conferences. As SEL Schools staff respond to the individual needs of their school community, the type of RPIs most often used will vary. Over the course of the school year, **SEL Schools staff provided over 1,800 services**, including student check-ins, group sessions, individual counseling, Circles, 1:1 Mindfulness and Restorative Circles, outreach, refocus, or Restorative questions sessions.



COMPARING SY 2021-22 TO SY 2022-23 WE SEE...

29%

IMPROVED ATTENDANCE

48%

REDUCED SUSPENSIONS

39%

MORE SERVICES PROVIDED

THIS IS WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

The SEL Schools Program has produced high rates of success at each school, including Cesar A. Batalla (91%), Dunbar (97%), Luis Muñoz Marín (99%), and Harding (100%). This indicates a positive impact of Restorative Practices in resolving conflicts.

“The integration of RYASAP within our school team has enabled us to service more students in less time.”

- Eloy Jaramillo, Assistant Principal, Cesar Batalla School

REDUCING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Chronic absenteeism (CA), or missing more than 10% of school days, can cause social and emotional consequences for students. Across the BPS district, 29% of students are chronically absent. These students might feel isolated from their peers and teachers. Addressing the root causes of chronic absenteeism is essential to ensure that all students have the opportunity to thrive academically and personally.

As schools continue to feel the aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic, CA rates **decreased at half of our SEL Schools** from SY 2021-22 to SY 2022-23. When we looked at 82 students enrolled at the highest risk, we saw a **29% improvement in attendance**. Dunbar and Luis Muñoz Marín schools saw a slight increase in Chronic Absenteeism rates. However, one Student Support Advocate at Dunbar School saw a 26% improvement in attendance among the medium- to high-risk students she worked with compared to the previous school year.

BPS has a history of cutting bus routes, which results in many students walking to school. Getting to school is hard for students because they have to walk through dangerous neighborhoods where violence is a risk. Inclement weather poses problems during the winter months. Both result in missed days. SEL Schools staff and school officials at Dunbar and Luis Muñoz Marín have explored the potential to address bus issues for the 2023-24 school year. By working together to address the issue of chronic absenteeism, we can help ensure that all students have the support they need to succeed and reach their full potential.

29%

Improved attendance rate of high-risk students





LASAISHA MCFADDEN, RESTORATIVE PRACTICES FACILITATOR, HARDING HIGH SCHOOL

"Restorative work is all about relationships. There are students who have benefited from the relationships I've built with them. We often cross paths because of a conflict or issue. [For the senior] students, having that motivation in person, with support and space to get things done, really pushed them to do their work. On graduation day, many students came up to me and hugged me hard and kept saying, "Thank you, Miss!" I kept telling them to be proud of themselves. Restorative work is focused on the whole student. The impact is bigger than we could see at the moment."

FINDING SOLUTIONS AT HARDING HIGH SCHOOL

We saw a dramatic rise of over 10% in Harding High School's chronic absenteeism rates in SY 2022-23. **Between September and December 2022, Harding recorded minimal instances of absence.** Based on prior years, school staff expected chronic absenteeism to be high during the holiday season. Yet CA peaked in January 2023 and continued throughout the school year.

Many seniors reported skipping classes due to feeling burnt out with school. These students would go to school, skip classes, and wander the hallways. If students arrived late to class, they were marked absent. The **Restorative Team at Harding High School provided a solution** by turning the Refocus Room into a study room. There, students could complete their academic work and prep for exams. Faculty agreed that this was an excellent strategy to address the issue. This helped many students succeed at the end of the school year.



IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE

The SEL School program works with the whole community of a school: students, faculty, staff, administrators, and parents to build a healthy school climate. By learning how to listen to and communicate with others, students peacefully resolve conflict and know when to ask for or offer help. Individuals learn how to better cope with emotional stress, solve problems, and avoid peer pressure to engage in potentially harmful activities. Students feel more engaged in school with a sense of belonging and can identify with a staff member they can trust and express their emotions and feelings.

CREATING STUDENT LEADERS THROUGH SEL AMBASSADORS

SEL Ambassadors are student leaders within their school communities. Over **200 SEL Ambassadors in grades 6 to 12 received Restorative Practices and School Climate Training** in 2022, expanding on the previous school year's training. They support the SEL team in building positive relationships to create and maintain a positive school climate where students feel a sense of belonging and safety and want to attend school. By training as an SEL Ambassador, students have a space for their voices to be heard, an avenue to practice leadership skills, and a venue to develop a deepened sense of trust and belonging.

The importance of the SEL Ambassador program was reinforced this past school year when there was an uptick in fights at sporting events. Ambassadors leaned on the skills and strategies they learned to support their social and emotional needs and those of their classmates to approach all situations in a restorative manner.

“The ambassadors gave me motivation to come to school and helped me make new friends.”

- BPS Senior, '23



LOWERING SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS

Although suspension rates were expected to increase at the end of hybrid learning environments, our SEL Schools suspension rates have only minimally increased at Cesar A. Batalla, Barnum, and Bridgeport Military Academy. Suspension rates have decreased in all other SEL Schools. With a BPS overall suspension rate of 7%, two of our SEL Schools, Barnum and Luis Muñoz Marín, maintained lower rates. Harding notably decreased their suspensions dramatically, **revealing a record-low rate of 8%, dropping from a high of 44% in the 2012-2013 school year.**

SUPPORTING OUR STUDENTS MOST AT RISK

Our SEL Schools staff engages with the entire school community, from students to parents to faculty, administrative teams, and staff. However, we have prioritized the medium- to high-risk students, referred to as a **focus student**. These students are referred to the SEL Schools Program by an administrator, support staff, or school official who struggle with attendance and have a history of school discipline. Typically, these students need an extra layer of customized support and Restorative Practice Interventions (RPIs), such as check-ins, individual sessions, or group circles. Nearly one-third of the 563 students we served this school year were considered focus students.

With the support of our SEL Schools staff, we found a **48% reduction in suspensions** among the focus student population. Of the 63 high-risk students discharged, **59% completed the program at a lowered (medium or low) risk level.**



Completed
the SEL CS
program at a
lowered risk

59%

FUTURE GOALS

TRANSFORMING BRIDGEPORT INTO A RESTORATIVE COMMUNITY

The SEL Schools Program is looking to expand its services to provide Restorative Practices training to all district athletic coaches, parents, and community members in response to student/parent physical altercations at sports events. The goal is to have Bridgeport become a restorative community as a whole and provide Restorative Practices training to staff at each organization. We would like to continue to provide restorative conferences to the greater Bridgeport community when harm has been done.

Other priorities include training facilitation and presentations in both English and Spanish to increase access, particularly among Spanish-speaking parents, as well as providing virtual training in the 2023-24 school year. We will continue to look to expand into new schools within the district.

Our focus in the coming school year will be to replicate the collaboration between the RP Facilitator, SEL Schools Program, and Harding High School Administration Team to increase parent and family engagement in our other schools. We hope the efforts will help to improve school attendance, student academic performance, and overall school climate. Students will receive mental health and drug awareness support and resources to become better informed and to help make better decisions.

JAYLYND LEON, STUDENT

When Jaylynd started 8th grade at Dunbar School, he felt very isolated, struggling to engage with other students and to be in the classroom. He worked with our Student Support Advocate, Melissa, in school and with RYASAP mentor Tyese, who engaged him in programs aligned with his graphic design and photography goals outside of school. By the end of the school year, he was motivated to complete his classwork, and as one teacher noted, “more than not, he has a smile on his face!” Through his work with Tyese, he participated in the *From the Concrete I Rose: Breaking Ground for the Next Generation of Artists* art exhibition at the Housatonic Museum of Art.





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES, DEFINITIONS, AND REFERENCES

- 1 AdvanceCT & CT Data Collaborative. (2023). *Bridgeport Town Profile*. Connecticut Town Profiles by CT Data Collaborative. Retrieved January 11, 2024, from profiles.ctdata.org.
- 2 School and State Finance Project. (2020). *Racial Disparities in Connecticut Education Funding*. New Haven, CT: Author. Retrieved January 12, 2024, from ctschooffinance.org/resources/uploads/files/Racial-Disparities-in-CT-Education-Funding.pdf.
- 3 Glasmeier, A. K. (2020). *Living Wage Calculator, Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Retrieved January 11, 2024, from livingwage.mit.edu.
- 4 U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). *Bridgeport city, Connecticut Income and Poverty*. U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved January 11, 2024, from data.census.gov/all?q=Bridgeport+city,+Connecticut+Income+and+Poverty.
- 5 The calculation of basic living expenses was derived from adding the average cost of housing, food, transportation, and childcare in the Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk metro area. This figure does not include medical costs, emergency funds, taxes, and/or other daily living expenses.
- 6 American Academy of Pediatrics. (2021). *AAP-AACAP-CHA Declaration of a National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health*. American Academy of Pediatrics. Retrieved September 29, 2023, from aap.org/en/advocacy/child-and-adolescent-healthy-mental-development/aap-aacap-cha-declaration-of-a-national-emergency-in-child-and-adolescent-mental-health/
- 7 Coe, Erica. (2023). *Getting to the bottom of the teen mental health crisis*. McKinsey Health Institute. Retrieved September 29, 2023, from mckinsey.com/mhi/our-insights/getting-to-the-bottom-of-the-teen-mental-health-crisis

LEADERSHIP AND STAFF

Marc Donald	<i>Executive Director</i>
Janice Andersen	<i>Deputy Director & Senior Vice President</i>
Mary Pat Healy	<i>Vice President, External Affairs & Strategy</i>
Stacey Goodwin	<i>Vice President, Operations</i>
Rodney Pelletier	<i>Vice President, Finance</i>
Scott Gentry	<i>Senior Director, Development & Communications</i>
Ashley Blanchard-Miller	<i>Director, Research & Policy</i>
Tina Quinones-Cabrera	<i>Director, Development</i>
Elizabeth Gorenbergh	<i>Manager, Communications</i>
Mory Hernandez	<i>Manager, SEL Schools Program</i>
Katherine Cavaliere	<i>Student Support Advocate, SEL Schools Program</i>
Andreana Lubin	<i>Student Support Advocate, SEL Schools Program</i>
Lasaisha McFadden	<i>Restorative Practice Facilitator, SEL Schools Program</i>
Jaquelyn Owens	<i>Restorative Practice Facilitator, SEL Schools Program</i>
Darley Paz	<i>Restorative Practice Facilitator, SEL Schools Program</i>
Anthony West	<i>Restorative Practice Facilitator, SEL Schools Program</i>

BY JOINING US, YOU ARE A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

Your commitment underscores your belief in the potential of every person in our community. Together, we work diligently to be a part of the solution to reduce youth and gun violence, advocate for healthier communities, and create a positive impact that extends far beyond today.

THANK YOU FOR BEING PART OF THE RYASAP COMMUNITY!

With your support, we provide the necessary resources, mentorship, and opportunities that might otherwise be inaccessible to those who need it most.



We thank you for supporting our mission to be a change-maker for underserved and marginalized youth, families, and neighborhoods in the greater Bridgeport area.

CONTACT

RYASAP

2470 Fairfield Ave., Bridgeport, CT 06605
(203) 579-2727

ryasap.com

[f](#) [@](#) [t](#) @ryasap