

2020 - 2021 IMPACT REPORT



THE NORA PROJECT



Practicing an Ability Inclusive Mindset

1. Presuming competence means....

- assuming someone can do something
- not getting mad at someone's mistake
- not judging based on appearance
- something else

2. Presuming competence helps practice an Ability Inclusive Mindset because....

- we plan to include everyone.
- we look beyond one activity to the bigger picture.
- we aim for inclusion in everything we do.
- something else

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from our executive director

In a school year that saw a massive statewide and national decline in student mental health due to the trauma of the pandemic, Nora Project students made empathy and inclusion gains, albeit at a lower rate compared to pre-pandemic years. Still, 95% of our intermediate level educators reported that The Nora Project helped build community during remote learning, while 81% of early elementary educators and 75% of high school teachers reported that Nora Project lessons helped students cope with the pandemic.

Indeed, in a difficult year, The Nora Project gave students and teachers a great deal to celebrate.

Among our Primer Pack students ranging in age from three to eight years old, from the beginning of the school year to the end, **there was massive growth in student perspectives on disability as a natural, valuable form of human diversity.**

In Storyteller classrooms, intermediate elementary and middle school teachers reported improvements in interactions of students of all abilities, including increases in kindness and acceptance, and decreases in conflict and bullying. Consistent with these reports, **students' prosocial empathy scores increased markedly from pre to post program surveys.**

Middle and high school students made strides, too. Three clubs completed Nora Project STEMpathy projects, **leaving their schools more inclusive at the end of the year than they were at the beginning.**

IMPACT REPORT KEY FINDINGS

Through a school year full of challenges, thanks to The Nora Project, our participating teachers, and our committed students, 2020-2021 was also a school year of kindness, disability inclusion, and social change in Nora Project schools.

2x

PRIMER PACK

By the end of the school year, more than twice as many students understood that disability is a form of diversity.

STORYTELLER PROJECT

Whether learning remotely or in-person, students' prosocial empathy scores increased substantially by the end of the school year.



100%

STEMPATHY CLUB

100% of teachers responded that their clubs identified problems and generated solutions to create a more inclusive school environment.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Before the pandemic, 1 in 5 children experienced a mental, behavioral or emotional disorder in the U.S. every year. Those already troubling figures were magnified by the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, a recent study done by Lurie Children's Hospital revealed most parents (71%) believed the pandemic affected their child's mental health negatively, and more than half of parents (58%) felt their child would benefit from professional help with their mental health challenges.

With a lack of trained school psychologists, school districts have turned to curricula that teach children social emotional skills alongside academics.

Studies have shown that social emotional learning (SEL) programs help students to manage stress, anxiety, and depression, and develop better attitudes about themselves and others.

Potentially because of the mental health crisis that started before the pandemic, the demand for SEL programs hit a record high in 2019.

With the onset of the pandemic in early 2020, the need for quality SEL for all students, including those students vulnerable to mental health challenges due to disability, has never been greater.

The Nora Project has risen to the challenge to meet the demand for quality SEL programming for all students from preschool to high school for the past four years. In this past year, during the darkest days of the pandemic, the organization went to great lengths to ensure that no matter a student's needs, and no matter whether they were learning in-person or remotely, they would have access to high quality SEL that validated their feelings, their identities, and the value of empathy and inclusion.

Findings show that in a challenging year, TNP made a positive impact on students' lives.

PRESCHOOL AND EARLY ELEMENTARY

PRIMER PACK

91% INCREASE

IN POSITIVE BEHAVIOR IN CLASS

Teachers also noticed positive changes in students resolving conflict without intervention (23% increase) and collaborating on tasks (54% increase).

113% INCREASE

IN UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF DIVERSITY

Students also made gains in familiarity with the word 'disability' (91% increase), and the belief that disability is a form of human diversity (103% increase).

18% INCREASE

IN STUDENTS IDENTIFYING EMOTIONS

Teachers also noted changes in students' emotional management (17% increase), and demonstrating empathy (17% increase).



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

Additional findings show:

- 81% of Primer Pack teachers reported that lessons helps students cope with the stressors of the pandemic.
- 91% of Primer Pack teachers felt that TNP helped build community during remote learning.

WHAT TEACHERS ARE SAYING

"Maintaining a culturally diverse and inclusive environment is an ongoing task. It doesn't just end with the introduction of these subjects.

Students need consistent exposure and opportunities to practice these skills in order to maintain them. That's why TNP is a great asset to our SEL time."

Primer Classroom Teacher

INTERMEDIATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

STORYTELLER

19% INCREASE

IN PROSOCIAL MOTIVATION

When looking at the student empathy data in aggregate from pre to post, including at schools unable to complete the program due to the disruption of the pandemic, students' cognitive empathy and affective empathy scores held relatively steady.

27% INCREASE

IN AFFECTIVE EMPATHY

Students receiving in person instruction for the full year also experienced substantial gains in Prosocial Motivation (21% increase) and notable gains in Cognitive Empathy (11% increase) when comparing pre to post scores.



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

Additional findings show:

- 95% of Storyteller teachers felt that program lessons helped students cope with the stressors of the pandemic.
- 95% of Storyteller teachers felt that TNP helped build community during remote learning.

WHAT TEACHERS ARE SAYING

"With everything going on this year, I learned how to incorporate all students' needs, biases, and backgrounds to best support their SEL.

My classroom was very diverse, their family needs varied, and their feelings about the pandemic spanned a wide spectrum. Through using The Nora Project, I was able to ground and unite my students in acceptance and seeing others differently."

Storyteller Classroom Teacher

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

STEMPATHY

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.



Additional findings show:

- Despite the disruption of the pandemic, STEMpathy Clubs were able to meet and positively impact their schools and communities.
- All teachers responded that STEMpathy Club members identified problems and generated solutions to create a more inclusive environment for people of all abilities for the school community.
- Several examples of projects that clubs worked on last school year were:
 - Creating an inclusive STEM science night in which Science Olympiad activities were made accessible to all students
 - Developing a plan to make the school stage accessible to all students
 - Developing Biology SEL lessons about disability, in which students with disabilities helped co-teach the lessons.

WHAT TEACHERS ARE SAYING

“Students were patient with each other and explained things to one another even if that meant waiting longer to sign-off.

Students were kind and used the chat box to reassure and encourage one another.”

STEMpathy Club Facilitator



THE NORA PROJECT
Building inclusive classrooms

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

The Nora Project
PO Box 664
Highland Park, IL 60035
www.thenoraproject.ngo

