



SchoolTalk

2022 ANNUAL REPORT

A New Foundation





Letter from the Executive Director

As the executive director of SchoolTalk, I am delighted to share with you the progress we have made in addressing the needs of school communities as they recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. With the release of SchoolTalk's 2022 Annual Report, we also celebrate finalizing our [2023-2025 Strategic Plan](#), which outlines "A New Foundation" for supporting students, schools, and systems in their journey of recovery. This plan focuses on adapting to the new learning environment and mitigating the consequences faced by students and educators.

As schools reopened last year, returning to the pre-pandemic operating model was not feasible. Both students and teachers had to adapt to a new way of engaging. Many students were not ready to learn, and students and staff members were grappling with personal trauma and finding it difficult to re-engage. Students of color and students with disabilities experienced a disproportionate burden from the effects of the pandemic. The latest data illustrates their struggles academically and socially, as evidenced by higher rates of suspension, chronic absenteeism, and low graduation rates.

In response, we continued to support schools by 1) engaging youth programming that makes students feel that they belong, are self-determined, and hopeful about the future; 2) Providing educators with restorative justice and inclusive skills, tools, and strategies to rebuild and sustain positive school cultures; and 3) Working collaboratively with other community organizations and agencies to highlight systemic inequities and advocate for improvements for at-risk youth, including improved juvenile justice systems, special education structures, and behavioral health services.

Challenges persist, including increasing violence that is severely impacting students' mental health and feelings of safety. D.C. students are more likely to witness violence than students in other states. From 2021 to 2022, D.C. witnessed an alarming surge of over 50% in fatal shootings involving students under 17.¹ These staggering figures demand immediate action. They require a multidisciplinary approach that provides a robust framework of accountability and collective understanding. It is imperative that we establish proactive measures to avert conflicts from arising, and implement effective responses when harm does occur.

We are excited to present this annual report, which highlights the remarkable progress education communities have made in their recovery from the pandemic and sheds light on the pressing needs they still face. Thank you for your continued trust in SchoolTalk. We are honored to serve you and the wider community. Together, let us create a new foundation of trust and inclusion so that we may build a brighter future for every student.

¹<https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/12/11/youth-gun-violence-dc/>



LEILA PETERSON
Executive Director

Leila Peterson has served as SchoolTalk's executive director since 2008. She is deeply committed to the work of advocating for youth with disabilities and helping schools institute policies and practices that promote inclusion and community building. Leila also teaches as an adjunct professor for the Carter School of Peace and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University.

SECTION ONE: *SchoolTalk Overview*

What We Do:

Founded in 2008, SchoolTalk is a District of Columbia-based nonprofit that supports the education community in collaboratively tackling critical and complex challenges and creating practical solutions for assisting youth with and without disabilities achieve success. SchoolTalk works to create positive school-based learning environments and impact students' lives through our two programmatic initiatives: InclusiveDC and RestorativeDC. Our theory of change illustrates how these programs are used to impact students, schools, and systems. This approach enables immediate support of students through direct service, improved school communities that build trust and belonging, and revamped ecosystem strategies to create long-lasting shifts that improve outcomes for all students.

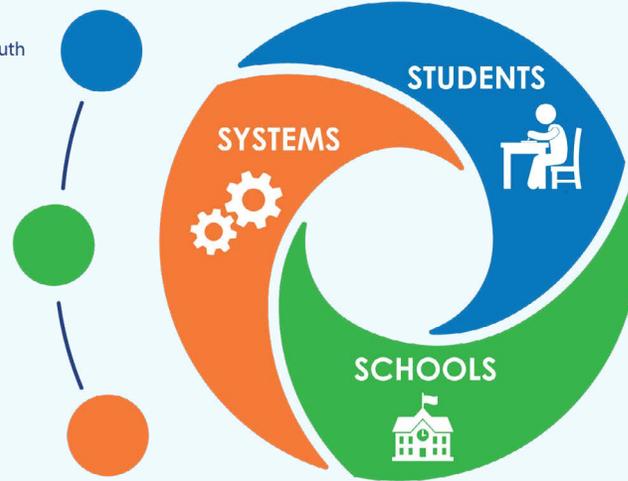


SchoolTalk's Theory of Change

PROVIDE youth-centered **PROGRAMMING** to equip every youth with the knowledge and skills to be successful after high school

Help adults **IMPROVE SCHOOL CULTURE** through restorative & inclusive policies and practices

CONNECT & ALIGN schools, agencies and other organizations through dialogue and collaborative problem-solving.



Operationalizing Our Theory of Change

RestorativeDC: Supports implementation of restorative justice & culture change through capacity-building professional development to lower incidents of conflict, reduce suspensions and expulsions, increase school performance, and center schools on relationships, inclusivity and accountability.

InclusiveDC : Works with D.C. youth with disabilities and their peers in schools, community organizations, and youth-serving systems. Identifies and bridges opportunity gaps for youth through two main programs: Arts to Advocacy and College & Career Readiness.



STUDENTS

We provide Workshops, Community Based Learning, Youth Conference & Councils so that Students in DC feel that they belong, are self-determined, and hopeful about the future



SCHOOLS

We provide Technical Assistance for Organizational Change, Training Modeling & Coaching, and Resources to improve Schools school cultures through inclusive and restorative practices



SYSTEMS

We act as a thought leader and convener to drive change in DC & beyond as nationally recognized experts in improving education for marginalized students.

SchoolTalk's Reach

2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR



223

D.C. youth involved in direct SchoolTalk programming



7859

Hours of programming SchoolTalk youth have participated in



75

Schools that SchoolTalk works with



1200+

Schools/organizational staff who participate in SchoolTalk programming



28+

Schools/organizations that SchoolTalk partners with

Our Team

SchoolTalk's staff has expertise in a variety of key areas, including restorative justice, Universal Design for Learning, workforce development, assistive technology, conflict resolution, nonviolent communication, positive discipline, trauma-informed practices, special education, and more. SchoolTalk serves a diverse community and employs a diverse team, including board members and supporters, who reflect that community. Over two-thirds of SchoolTalk's staff identify as a Person of Color. We view disability as a critical component of our Race, Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity initiatives, and over half of our staff self-identify as having a disability. SchoolTalk employs three full-time youth leadership program assistants who graduated from D.C. schools and connected to SchoolTalk through its youth programming. Their input helps us to ensure authentic youth voice is integrated across all SchoolTalk programs. SchoolTalk's board of directors enriches our organization's strategic efforts with their diverse experiences, backgrounds, and abilities. More than half of our board members represent Black, Indigenous, and Person of Color communities.



SECTION TWO: *Students*

GOAL: *Improve youth outcomes through programming that supports students to feel like they belong, are self-determined, and hopeful about their futures.*

WORK-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCES, A CORNERSTONE OF YOUTH SUCCESS

Teon Logan, a recent graduate of Coolidge High School, discovered his passion for photography through his siblings. However, he lacked the opportunity to pursue it professionally until he participated in SchoolTalk's school-based workshops in 2020. Through these workshops, Teon learned the art of photography and videography, mastering skills such as microphone usage, lighting setup, and team collaboration. Beyond technical expertise, Teon also developed essential business skills, including pricing his services, punctuality, teamwork, and self-advocacy.

Teon's journey towards professional photography took off when SchoolTalk's programming provided him with a Work Based Learning Experience (WBLE) in photography. The program instilled in him a sense of independence and boosted his self-confidence. Recognizing his mother's concerns about his safety, SchoolTalk arranged for her to accompany him on his first job, easing her worries. Teon was thrilled to be paid for his work, taking headshots for the D.C. Department on Disability Services staff. This experience not only added to his professional portfolio but also provided him with a stepping stone for future job prospects.

As SchoolTalk continued to support Teon, he seized opportunities to advocate for other youth with disabilities. He served as a youth panelist at our virtual Secondary Transition Institute, where he shared his personal journey to the workforce. At the "My Future Matters Symposium" organized by the U.S. Department of Labor, Teon engaged in meaningful discussions about disability



*SchoolTalk's Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLE) allow youth to **INTERACT, ENGAGE, and NETWORK** directly with potential employers and move through the phases of career development: work awareness, career exploration, career preparation, and career assimilation. Along with our employer engagement initiatives, InclusiveDC is expanding our WBLEs by increasing opportunities for youth, including community internships, job shadowing, situational assessments, guest speakers, panels, business tours, career and education fairs, informational interviews, mentorships, and more.*

and employment challenges faced by young people. Additionally, he co-facilitated a photography workshop at SchoolTalk's Voices of Change conference, empowering fellow youth with disabilities to express themselves through art.

Teon reflects on his growth, "I feel a great sense of improvement from where I started to where I am now. My experience with these programs has taught me many important skills and will allow me to gain a job in the future. Pictures are art, and they allow you to express your feelings." His words emphasize the important role SchoolTalk's programming plays in fostering youth creativity and independence among D.C. youth." SchoolTalk provides unique WBLE's to individuals with special needs. Through this support, Teon has not only experienced personal growth but also stands ready to inspire and assist others on their own journeys.





SECTION THREE: *Schools*

GOAL: Equip schools with the mindsets, tools, and processes to better support every marginalized student, including students with disabilities.

CREATING A FOUNDATION FOR LEARNING

Columbia Heights Educational Campus (CHEC) in Washington, D.C. serves over 1500 students from over 67 countries, with the majority qualifying for free or reduced lunch. In recent years, the school has prioritized implementing restorative practices to foster connections between adults and students and create an engaged and supported learning environment.

During the initial year of implementation, CHEC formed a restorative justice implementation team and appointed a full-time restorative justice coordinator. The team focused on building internal capacity and introducing restorative justice principles to the staff so that they could address harm and resolving issues after they occurred. As staff became more comfortable, they expanded their efforts to include proactive practices, such as restorative circles in staff meetings and promoting peaceful resolutions to student conflicts.

By the second year, most staff were familiar with restorative practices, and teachers began using circles in their classrooms to build community and establish norms. The school transformed its in-school suspension room into a "Restorative Corner," emphasizing inclusion over exclusion. Over the following years, CHEC deepened and expanded its restorative justice work, integrating regular check-in circles into the school schedule, updating behavior referral processes and policies, and incorporating student-led facilitation.

CHEC also prioritized the integration of restorative justice and special education, creating materials and processes accessible to all students. They used Universal Design for



MEANINGFUL and SUSTAINABLE

implementation of **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE** requires time, resources, and a strong commitment from school leaders, staff, and the wider school community. RestorativeDC provides intensive and collaborative technical support and coaching over three to five years for schools ready to make a long-term commitment to integrating restorative justice into their overall philosophy and school culture. **THE WHOLE SCHOOL RESTORATIVE MODEL** touches all members of the school community and their relationships with each other.

"[Restorative justice] has become an overall value... It's in our handbook, mission statement, part of the orientation, and our meetings with parents. It has helped build student leadership and students' ability to resolve conflicts.

-- Maria Tukeva, Principal

Learning principles and translated documents into multiple languages. Educators considered whether student behavior was a manifestation of their disability and made efforts to meet their needs, leading to a more positive learning environment.

CHEC's commitment to restorative justice has led to lower staff turnover, higher staff retention rates, and a healthier school culture. Principal Maria Tukeva believes restorative justice has taken hold at CHEC due to ongoing training and the dedication of the staff. While there is always more work to be done, the school has made significant progress in creating a restorative culture that values relationships and supports the success of all students.





SECTION FOUR: *Systems*

GOAL: *Engage as an active thought-leader to share learning and insights, codify models and recommendations, and convene disparate actors to build relationships, problem solve and find ways to collaborate for systems change*

STRENGTHENING TRANSITION SERVICES: THE POWER OF THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The power of networking and collaboration cannot be underestimated, especially when it comes to serving transition-age youth. In the field of special education, professionals often find themselves working in isolation, lacking resources and connections to better support their students. The D.C. Secondary Transition Community of Practice (ST CoP) has proven to be a valuable resource for professionals in the field of secondary transition. We spoke with three ST CoP participants: Erika Thomas, Carmen Zahra, and Conchita King, who shared the impact ST CoP had on their work, the connections they've made, and the initiatives that emerged from this collaborative community.

Thomas, the transition manager at E.L. Haynes Public Charter School, remembered her first encounter with the ST CoP. As a newcomer to her role, she faced the challenge of not having anyone to properly train and prepare her for supporting the transition portion of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities. Through research, she discovered the ST CoP and quickly realized its potential for professional growth and support. Zahra, from the College Living Experience in Maryland, shared a similar journey, having found the ST CoP while researching opportunities to support her youth. King, the longest-serving member of the ST CoP, initially joined to find resources for her D.C. students. Ultimately, the ST CoP proved to be a platform for sharing resources, ideas, and best practices for all three women.



*The D.C. Secondary Transition Community of Practice (ST CoP) supports the professionals serving D.C. youth with disabilities as they transition into a self-directed life. It is a citywide, cross-section of stakeholders who come together to **STRENGTHEN** their individual and collective **ABILITY FOR ACTION**. This ST CoP falls under SchoolTalk's InclusiveDC initiative and is funded by the D.C. Office of the State Superintendent for Education's Division of Postsecondary Career & Education.*

Networking has been a key benefit of the CoP for all three individuals. Through the ST CoP, King, the transition coordinator at Shepherd Pratt School, connected with the Quality Trust for Individuals With Disabilities and Best Buddies in Virginia and D.C., who provided workshops for her students and participated in college and career fairs. Erika received an \$11,000 grant to enhance STEM resources for her students after hearing about the opportunity through the ST CoP. She reflected, "If it were not for connections made through the ST CoP, with people already doing the work, I don't think I would be successful in my role. I just don't know how I could be." The ST CoP provided a platform to bridge the gap between various organizations and strengthened the capacity of these professionals to better serve transition-age youth.

"It's been great learning about and being able to tap into funding that I would also not have known about if it weren't for SchoolTalk."

**-Erika Thomas,
Transition Manager**

The ST CoP has proven to be a powerful platform for networking, resource sharing, and collaboration among professionals serving transition-age youth. Through the ST CoP, individuals like Thomas, Zahra, and King have found support, discovered valuable resources, and made meaningful connections that strengthened their capacity to serve their students effectively. To create an even better comprehensive network of support for transition-age youth, they propose expanding its reach by involving more stakeholders from Maryland and Virginia and including more decision-makers to bridge the gap and improve their overall understanding and support of transition services. As the ST CoP continues to grow and expand its reach, it has the potential to transform the transition service network in D.C., Maryland, and Virginia, ensuring that no student is left behind in their journey toward independence and success.



"There's a tremendous number of untapped resources. There's also a lot of financial aid available for those schools, Secondary Transition professionals, and families. If we collectively put our brains together, we could find them and help each other make use of them."

-Carmen Zahra, National Director of Outreach

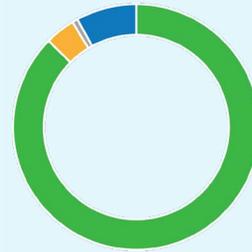
SECTION FIVE: *Financials*

SchoolTalk 2022 FINANCIALS

Revenue

	DC Government Contracts	\$2,293,654
	Fee for Service	\$103,588
	Individual Contributions	\$19,486
	Foundation/Nonprofit Grants	\$208,237
Total		\$2,624,965

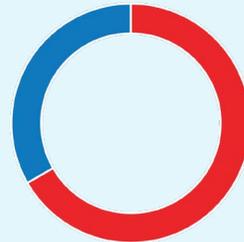
REVENUE



Expenses

	Program	\$1,682,674
	Admin, Ops, Development	\$840,845
Total		\$2,150,463

EXPENSES



SchoolTalk is committed to partnering with local, community-based organizations. \$477,697 of our program expenses went to local DC Certified Business Enterprises (<https://dslbd.dc.gov/getcertified>)



SECTION SIX: *Thank You to Our Funders*

Despite immense challenges, we have been fortunate to have unwavering support from our dedicated Board and incredible network of supporters and partners. Throughout this journey, they have stood by our side, offering their invaluable assistance at every turn. We are truly grateful and extend our heartfelt thanks to each and every one of them.



SchoolTalk Board of Directors



JENNIFER THOMAS

Board Chair

Jennifer is the owner of Still Small Voice, LLC. Jennifer is a former educator with more than 15 years of experience focusing youth development and leadership. She has worked in the non-profit sector and is currently a policy advisor at the federal level. In her current position, she focuses on employment matters pertaining to people with disabilities.



MARY GATELY

Secretary

Mary is a Managing Partner at DLA Piper's DC Office and Co-Head of Washington DC Litigation Practice Group. Mary focuses on reputation management, class actions, cross-border litigation, and other complex litigation in the fields of the First Amendment, product liability, and commercial litigation. She serves on the Hiring Committee and Pro Bono Committee in the Washington, DC office.



JAI RAO

Treasurer

Jai is an experienced technology leader with a focus on supporting Finance organizations. Jai also serves on the Technology Pro Bono council at Capital One. Jai is a resident of Washington, DC along with his wife, and son who attends a DC public school. Jai earned his B.S. in Accounting from American University. He has a passion for addressing social inequity and particularly the Digital Divide.



LIONEL ANDRE

Lionel André is chairman and chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer of Securities Enforcement Compliance Investigation & Litigation, PLLC (SECIL). Lionel defends clients in parallel enforcement matters involving the U.S. Securities & Exchange Commission and the Department of Justice. He also conducts internal investigations and defends companies and their executives in government investigations. Lionel began his career at the SEC's Division of Enforcement. During his 14 years at the SEC, Lionel handled securities cases in federal court and administrative proceedings around the country. After the SEC, Lionel served as Assistant United States Attorney in the Fraud and Public Corruption Section of the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia. Lionel is passionate about youth empowerment, mentorship, criminal justice reform, and human rights.



XIAO LIU

Xiao is a Finance Manager at Ed-Ops. She is an experienced finance lead with a demonstrated history of working in the education management industry. She is a strong finance professional skilled in New Market Implementation, Financial Planning and Analysis, Regulatory Compliance, Audit, Budgeting, and Accounting.



CHARLES MOORE

Charles Moore is the principal at Thrive Street Advisors. He is an executive coach and consultant who helps leaders improve impact and organizations better execute strategy. Charles focuses on the intersection of strategy, implementation, and leadership, specifically, helping executives improve their ability to achieve results with a clear lens for the leadership, management, and personal practices that are most relevant for a leader's purpose, their strategy, and their organization's culture. He has coached leaders across the for-profit and nonprofit sectors, including Capital One, Hilton Hotels, and Advancing Real Change. Charles attended Harvard College for his undergraduate degree. He earned an MBA and an MA in Education from Stanford. His certificate in Leadership Coaching is from Georgetown University.



SHALINI SHYBUT

Shalini Ananthanarayanan Shybut is an independent coach and consultant working with nonprofit leaders, primarily in the education space, in Washington, DC. She was most recently a founding member and Partner of Schools and Talent Investments at Education Forward DC, a local venture philanthropy organization whose mission is to improve outcomes for DC students who are furthest from opportunity. Prior to this role, Shalini was at E.L. Haynes Public Charter School, where she worked with school leaders to improve the school's ability to meet the needs of underserved students, and co-led several key strategy projects as E.L. Haynes expanded to full size. Earlier in her career, Shalini spent time at the Recovery School District and worked in the private sector McKinsey & Company. Shalini started her career with Teach For America as a fifth grade teacher in a bilingual inclusion classroom. Shalini lives in Washington, DC with her husband and three children and also serves on the board of DC International Public Charter School.

**PAUL TIMM**

Paul Timm is director of marketing, leading the global marketing organization for the Connected Aviation Solutions business at Collins Aerospace. He is a strategic, data-driven marketer who grows businesses through positioning, branding, product marketing, digital transformation, and innovation. Paul is a collaborative team leader, demand generator, and problem solver, experienced in technology, financial services, consumer goods, and global markets. Paul is an active advocate for students with disabilities and LGBTQ youth. He also serves on boards for the Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee, the University of Richmond Customer Experience Center, and advises startup businesses. He holds an MBA from Duke University and is fluent in Spanish.

**ELLEN WAYNE**

Ellen Wayne has been involved with SchoolTalk since before it had a name or a staff. As a professor teaching conflict management at the University of Baltimore, she was asked to join a group headed by the DC Appleseed Center for Law and Piper Rudnick (now DLA Piper) to explore reforms that could be undertaken to "fix" special education in the District of Columbia. Over a great deal of time and with enormous persistence by many, a part of that effort became SchoolTalk, first as a group of volunteers who worked to create the program, and eventually with the hiring of Leila Peterson as Executive Director and, eventually, the leader of the robust SchoolTalk program. Ellen has now retired after serving for twelve years as the head of the Center for Early Dispute Resolution (CEDR), a function of the Department of Defense Education Association, which oversees DoD schools in the U.S. and internationally. Ellen's role included developing interventions to address high-conflict situations in the schools and providing proactive conflict resolution training for DoDEA personnel worldwide. Ellen holds a law degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and an MS degree in conflict management from the University of Baltimore.

What's Next

Circle Up DC is SchoolTalk's RestorativeDC podcast, where we have real conversations about the opportunities and challenges of implementing restorative justice in District of Columbia schools. Hear local restorative justice practitioners share their expertise and learn from their journeys. If you're looking for practical tips and resources for implementing restorative justice in education spaces, this podcast is for you!



PODCAST

Connecting Communities
Through Restorative Practices

<https://schooltalkdc.org/circleupdc/>



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