

# HOW DO WE KNOW IT WORKS?

Researching the Impact of Facing History and Ourselves since 1976



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The website **Evidence for ESSA** (Federal Every Student Succeeds Act) expanded its offerings to include evaluations of **social-emotional learning** programs nationwide in 2020. This Johns Hopkins University effort, headed by Robert Slavin and others at the *Center for Research and Reform in Education* sifted through almost 150 SEL programs and then winnowed them down to 25 programs that met their high standards for evidence of efficacy. Facing History and Ourselves is listed as having strong outcomes in academic and social relationships.

(Evidence for ESSA/SEL, 2020)

“The Lippman Kanfer Prize for Applied Jewish Wisdom celebrates programs that apply the ever-accumulating body of Jewish wisdom to **help people...navigate life's big questions...**The 2018-19 Prize sought submissions from social-impact organizations that have an existing program or the seed of a new idea to **apply Jewish wisdom to support democracy and civic engagement..**” The Jewish Education team at Facing History and Ourselves was one of seven selected recipients chosen from a pool of 127 organizations.

(Lippman Kanfer Prize for Applied Jewish Wisdom, 2019)

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has selected Facing History and Ourselves as one of only nine social-emotional learning programs in the US that has a proven positive effect on students, including increased empathy, prosocial behavior, and a better classroom climate. Facing History is also **one of only two programs**, out of nearly 400 nominated, that is proven to be effective for **both** middle and high school students.

(CASEL, 2015)

The April 2013 issue of *The Progress of Education Reform* provides a close look at the new civics and offers “Six Proven Practices of Civic Learning That Promote Student Civic Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions”. They spotlighted Facing History and Ourselves as a **model program**, which exemplifies one of those key practices, namely, “Discussion of Current Events and Controversial Issues”.

(ECS, 2013)

The US Department of Education 2012 report, *Advancing Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy: A Road Map and Call to Action*, spotlighted Facing History and Ourselves as a “**Next Generation Leader**” in civics education in American schools.

(D.O.E., 2012)

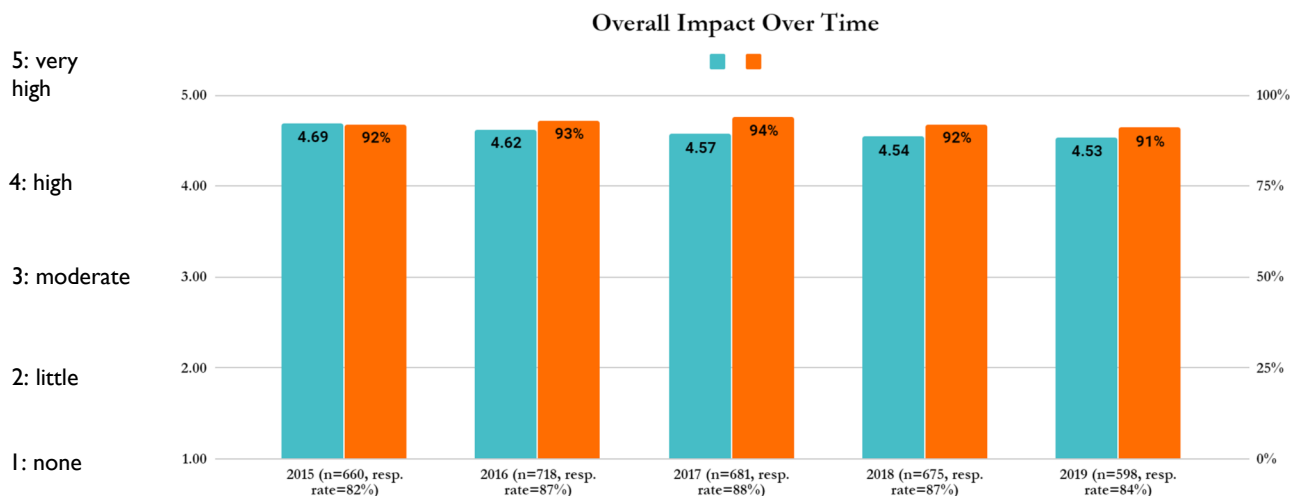
For sixteen years, the US Department of Education selected Facing History and Ourselves as an “**exemplary program**” worthy of dissemination through the federal government’s National Diffusion Network.

(Lieberman, 1993)

 Denotes research conducted or validated by independent scholars, while other information comes from studies conducted by Facing History’s Evaluation Department.

## Positive and Consistent Impacts of Facing History Professional Development

Educators rate the overall impact, mean score and percentage rating it as “high” or “very high” over time



## **Proven Impact on Teacher Self-Efficacy for Fostering Academic and Civic Learning**

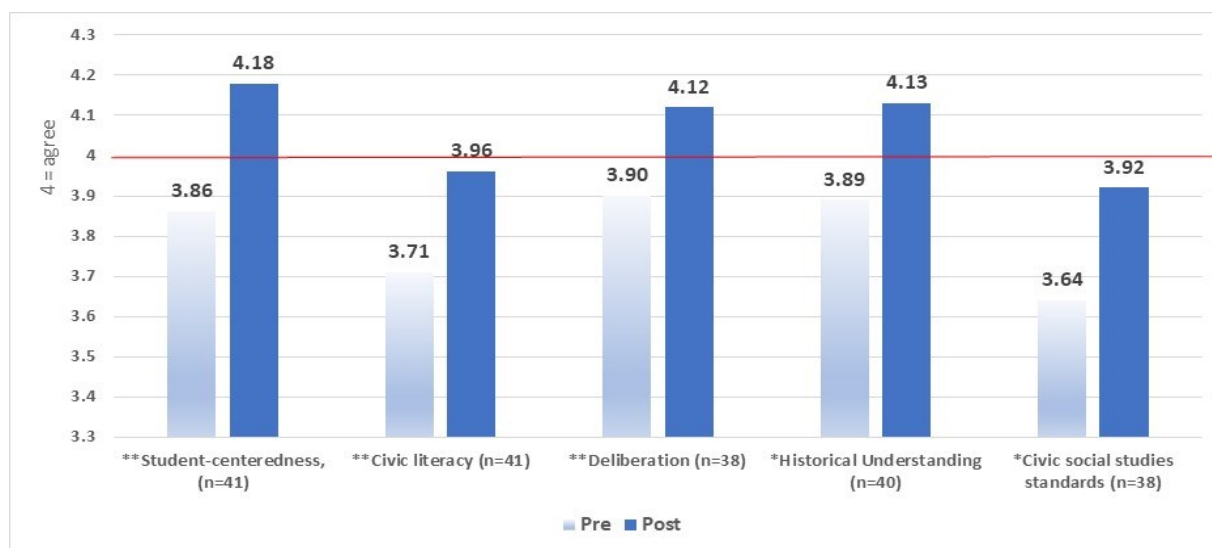
**Randomized Controlled Trial:** The study included 113 high school teachers and their 1,371 students in 60 schools across eight regions of the US (Findings published in peer-reviewed article in *Teachers College Record* 2015.)

- Participation in a Facing History professional development seminar and follow-up activities has a statistically significant impact on **teacher self-efficacy in eight instructional domains**—including creating student-centered classrooms—**satisfaction with professional development** experiences, and **satisfaction and engagement in the teaching profession**. (Barr et al. 2015)

These findings were replicated with a second group of teachers and the effects were sustained in the second year for the first group.

## Significant Growth in Teacher Self-efficacy

During the 2018-2019 academic year, FH conducted 10 different workshops for 308 Chicago Public School teachers. Educators then participated in the first full year of a district-wide effort to teach Facing History units in *Choices in Little Rock* in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and *Holocaust and Human Behavior* and *Reconstruction* in high school so as to support their efforts to meet social studies standards in compelling and meaningful ways. Facing History created teacher and student guides which mapped the content and methods onto these standards. Using a pre-post study design, we sought to understand the impact of this professional development and the experience of teaching these Facing History units: Forty-two participating teachers with matching pre-post data showed **statistically significant improvement** in all five domains of self-efficacy. [\*\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ ] (Romer, 2019) [5 pt. Likert scale, excerpted detail in chart]



## Gold-Standard Study

This randomized controlled study of the impact of *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior* included 1,371 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students from eight regions of the US.

On a performance measure of historical understanding using seven historical documents, students were asked to interpret and integrate information about inter-ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990's and to select items that they believe best explained aspects of what took place during that conflict.

Facing History students demonstrated **significantly stronger skills for historical analysis** of agency, evidence, and causation than did the control group. (Barr et al., 2015)

## Facing History Engages Students

This study of Chicago Public School teachers who taught Facing History and Ourselves units of *Choices in Little Rock* in eighth grade and *Reconstruction or Holocaust and Human Behavior* in high school also showed powerful impacts on students, according to their teachers.

- 89% of these educators agreed or strongly agreed that studying CILR/HHB/Reconstruction has **increased my students' engagement in learning** (mean: 4.23, n=44)
- 75% of these educators agreed or strongly agreed that studying CILR/HHB/Reconstruction has **made my students more motivated to work hard in my class** (mean: 3.93, n=44)

(Romer, 2019)

## Facing History Partner School Promotes Academic Motivation and Self-Efficacy

At a low-performing urban school in the midst of a major effort to improve school culture, we surveyed 247 students representing 40% of the student body across all grades. "This class" refers to a Facing History-infused humanities class.

- 72% of students rated, "This class has **motivated me to work harder in school**," as "mostly true" or "completely true".
  - 71% of students rated, "Because of my participation in this class, **I am writing with more confidence**," as "mostly true" or "completely true".
- (Romer & Barr, 2018)

## Alumni of a Facing History Partner School Surpass Peers in College Enrollment and Persistence

A study of alumni of an urban/suburban magnet school founded with Facing History at its core found meaningful academic and civic outcomes. The student pool is 82% students of color and 68% eligible for free or reduced lunch.

- Every graduate since its first graduating class in 2007 has been **accepted** by at least one college.
- **80% were enrolled in college** at any time during the first two years after graduation, in contrast to 67% in the district.
- **85% of enrolled students persisted** from the first to the second year of college (class of 2010) compared to 75% of students in the district; 80% from a national sample of high minority, urban, low income schools; and 88% among low minority, higher income schools.

(Romer et al., 2014)

## Facing History Students are Motivated to Learn

A quasi-experimental study conducted at a high school in Palm Beach County, Florida compared 417 Facing History 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students to 131 of their peers in 31 classes. Compared to their peers, Facing History students were:

- 94% more likely to report that **their class motivated them to learn**.
  - 90% more likely to report that **their class used interesting and engaging reading materials**.
- (Sechser, Barr, et al., 2005)

"Historical cases of social injustice can be taught in a way that helps students to integrate their natural inclination for **ethical reflection with the intellectual rigor required of historical understanding**."

(Selman & Bellino, 2011)

## Facing History Promotes Literacy Skills Aligned with State Standards

- 95% of Facing History elective teachers in Memphis agreed or strongly agreed that their elective course **promoted their students' abilities to build their knowledge** through content-rich nonfiction.
- 91% of the elective teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the course **promoted their students' abilities to ground reading, writing, and speaking in evidence** from text.

(Romer & Makransky, 2015)



## Facing History Improves Social, Emotional, and Ethical Awareness

A district-wide, randomized controlled study demonstrated statistically significant increases in 7<sup>th</sup> grade students' **empathy, prosocial behavior, civic attitudes**, and **decreases in conduct problems** compared to a control group. After two years of exposure to Facing History, students, now in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, were **less likely than a control group to endorse bystanding** and **more likely to intervene in bullying situations**.

(Domitrovich et al., 2014)

### The Need to Make Equity Central to SEAD

*“The prioritization of social, emotional, and academic development (SEAD) through a racial equity lens is one critical piece of the puzzle [of achieving full equity for all students]”.*

—Aspen Institute, May 2018

## Facing History Jewish Partner Schools Project Helps Students Develop a Jewish Identity Centered on Ethical Values and Community Connections

63 teachers from eight Jewish Day Schools were asked about how the presence of Facing History in their schools has affected their students. Teachers described an enhanced focus on values such as upstanding, social justice, helping others, and responsibility to the larger community.

Teachers reported positive behavioral changes in their students and attributed them to the incorporation of Facing History values into their school. The **common vocabulary** of “upstander”, “bystander”, and “universe of obligation” helped students and teachers connect values to their everyday lives. One teacher wrote that FH was most helpful...

*“...by providing a context, resources, vocabulary, and experiences through which difficult topics can be examined in meaningful ways that equip students with a better understanding of the world in which they live and how they can make that world a better place.”*

(Barr & Leonard, 2012)

## Teaching for Equity and Justice: Multi-year Effort Reaching All Faculty Has Strong Impacts

Facing History conducted a multi-year project focused on “Teaching for Equity and Justice” across a network of ten urban schools. This adult learning journey, which targets all faculty and staff, includes four modules:

1. Establishing Brave Space for Social-emotional and Academic Development (SEAD)
2. Exploring History, Race and Educational Inequity
3. Developing Mindsets for Equity-Based Work &
4. Facing History and Culturally Responsive Teaching

This work intentionally focuses on adult development of educators, especially educator mindsets and practices that address the centrality of race as it informs our approach to creating more equitable schooling.

During the first three years of the research we found the following broad project outcomes. This professional development and coaching led to:

- School leaders became more efficacious in developing a vision for school improvement focused on fostering equity and culturally responsive mindsets and practices
- Improved relationships at all levels, with the exception of student-to-student relationships in turnaround schools
- Improved educator mindsets and practices, in particular improved student-centeredness to a statistically significant degree
- More engaged, aware, and empowered students in the most challenged schools, i.e. turnaround schools with high teacher and school leader turnover

(Romer & Barr, 2020)

*“When schools provide the kind of opportunities that allow students to learn and practice a variety of **civic skills**... Then we see increases in both students’ commitment to and capacity for **future participation**.”*

(Kahne & Middaugh, 2008)

## Members of a UK Student Leadership Group Demonstrate Strong Civic Engagement

From 2016 to 2018, dozens of students from across London participated in a civic-oriented student leadership group. After participating in the group for several months (n=45):

- 96% agreed or strongly agreed that it is important to **challenge inequalities in society**.
- 96% agreed or strongly agreed that people should **assist those in their lives who need help**.
- 93% agreed or strongly agreed that they try to **help when they see people in need**.
- 93% agreed or strongly agreed that it is important to **work for positive social change**.
- 93% agreed or strongly agreed that it is important to **get involved in improving their community**.

—Barr [insert yr]

## Rigorous Study shows that Facing History Promotes Tolerance and Civic Efficacy

This large scale randomized controlled trial of Facing History and Ourselves demonstrated that Facing History:

- **Promoted respect** and **tolerance** for the rights of others whose views differ from one’s own.
- **Fostered awareness** of the power and danger of prejudice and discrimination.
- Increased students’ sense of **civic efficacy**—the capacity to make a difference in society.

The sample included 1,371 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students from eight regions of the US.

(Barr et al., 2015)

*“Sociopolitical consciousness refers to an individual’s ability to critically analyze the political, economic, and social forces shaping society and one’s status in it. A growing body of scholarship reports that **high levels of sociopolitical consciousness are predictive in marginalized adolescents of a number of key outcomes including resilience and civic engagement**.” [emphasis added]*

--Scott Seider, et al, *Applied Developmental Science*, 20 Jan. 2017

## Four-Year Longitudinal Study Documents Growth of Political Agency among Facing History Students

In a longitudinal study of five urban charter high schools with the explicit goal of fostering students’ academic and civic development, independent researchers explored differences in socio-political consciousness among cohorts of freshman entering high school in 2013 over four years until their graduation in spring 2017. They conducted both pre and post tests each year, as well as interviews to understand *how these adolescents made sense of the schooling practices* that promoted their political agency, social awareness and social action, the three elements they explored which make up critical consciousness.

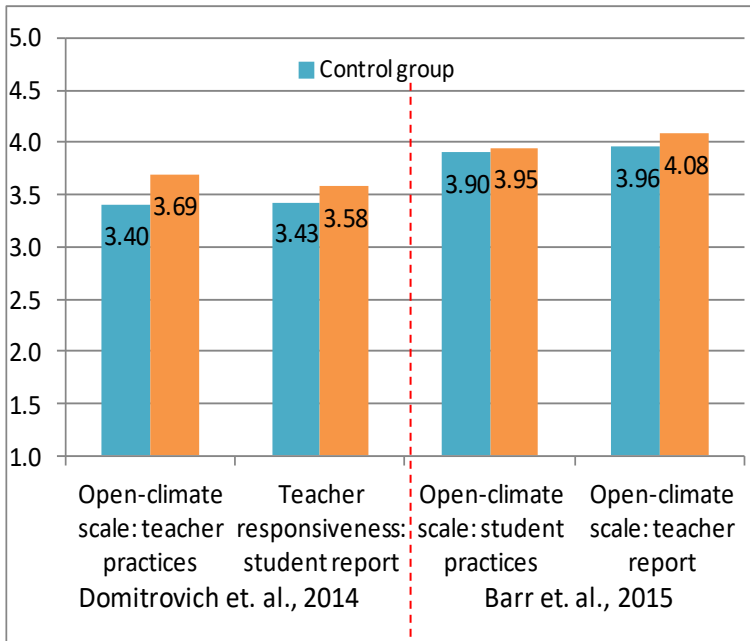
One of these schools uses Facing History deeply, it is a small New England charter with 91% students of color, many of immigrant background and high poverty (78% received free and reduced lunch). The school is a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools, and a founding member of the **Facing History Partner School Network**.

The researchers found that students in all five schools **increased their political agency over the course of their four years of high school**. However, these Facing History students’ increased in their feelings of political agency to a greater degree **than students at the other study schools** and their level at the end of their schooling was **higher than that of comparison seniors** who were not in civic-mission high schools.

- Seider & Graves, 2020

## i Two Randomized Controlled Studies Show Impact on Classroom Climate

Studies demonstrate that Facing History teachers foster classroom climates that are significantly more inclusive, respectful, and tolerant of differing view points and beliefs than control classrooms. Facing History interventions in middle schools and high schools lead to the development of **safer** and more **engaging learning environments** (Barr et al., 2015), as well as open classrooms that **promote student voice** and **teacher responsiveness** (Domitrovich et al., 2014).



## i Facing History Promotes Positive Relationships Within Schools

A randomized controlled trial proved that in urban middle schools where Facing History was being taught in all humanities classes, students reported **better relationships among students** and **greater respect between teachers and students**.

(Domitrovich et al., 2014)

*"[Facing History] raises expectations, students become more effective communicators, they can translate a historical event to their own lives. Other teachers see 'they can do this' [and so change their expectations of students]..."*

- Administrator at an alternative school for students in the juvenile justice system (Romer, 2015)

## i New Comparison Study: Facing History and Ourselves' Professional Development had Significant, Positive Impacts on School Climate

In these challenging times in our nation's history, it is especially encouraging to identify strategies that work in helping students to feel safer and respected for who they are, so that they can reach their potential as students and civic participants.

The study, by researchers in the **Austin Independent School District**, found that middle school students of Facing History-trained teachers (in one school) gave significantly higher ratings than comparable middle school students at other schools (matched in terms ethnicity, gender and percent receiving free or reduced price lunch) on **14 of 15 dimensions of school climate**, including:

- **Greater respect and less bullying** among classmates
- **Better relationships between teachers and students**
- **A greater sense of safety, well-being** and **school engagement** among students

The district provides all students, including the comparison students, with social and emotional learning (SEL) opportunities at all grade levels. Nonetheless, the students in the school with Facing History-trained teachers (284 students in the sample) had more positive perceptions of school climate than comparison students (173 students).

Students in the intervention sample had at least one teacher who had in-depth training, and all of their teachers had the school-wide trainings focused on nurturing responsive community, and humanities teachers had supportive instructional leaders, perhaps leading to the positive school climate outcomes.

The results of this study are striking in that a relatively brief intervention resulted in **improvements in students' perceptions of school climate**.

The context may help to explain how this was possible. The **Austin Unified School District** has prioritized social and emotional learning district wide, so the middle school teachers who received this intervention may have been particularly receptive and motivated to use Facing History in their teaching to reach district standards.

(Lamb AISD, Jan. 2019)

## Facing History Supports a Culture of Respect

Students from a small public urban charter school which has incorporated Facing History through all humanities courses report a vivid and compelling picture of Facing History's impact on the whole school. 137 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students were surveyed, representing 78% of the students in those grades.

- 95% of students have observed ways in which **Facing History has positively impacted their school.**
- 93% of juniors and sophomores and 92% of seniors reported that **bullying occurs “very rarely” or “rarely”.**

(Romer, 2011)

In a subsequent case study, students affirmed and the researcher observed, a strong **school-wide culture of civic responsibility.** Students reported a **strengthening of their academic efforts and commitment to learning over time.** They described a culture of high expectations and hard work, and teachers committed to helping them meet those high expectations.

- 93% of students from this school were **enrolled in college** at some point during their first two years after high school, according to National Student Clearinghouse data from 2010.

(Romer, 2012)

## Teachers and Students in Partner Schools Demonstrate High Levels of Respect

52 educators from four Chicago Partner Schools—three middle schools and one high school—responded to a survey designed to study how educators frame the goals and added value of Facing History to their schools.

- 91% of educators agreed or strongly agreed that **adults** in their school demonstrate **respect for differences.**
- 87% agreed or strongly agreed that adults in their school are **rarely disrespectful** to students.
- 83% agreed or strongly agreed that **most students** in their school **treat adults with respect.**
- 81% agreed or strongly agreed that **students** in their school demonstrate a **respect for differences.**

(Barr & Becker, 2018)

## Partner Schools Affect Teacher Self-Efficacy

The Facing History and Ourselves Memphis Neighborhood Schools Network involves schools that primarily serve students with historically marginalized identities in the context of schooling. The project aims to change school culture such that teachers from all disciplines assume that *all their students* can and will learn. The project also seeks to support practices that enable all students to thrive. The study involved a pre-post test design, fielding the same survey each year.

In year one, across all seven partner schools in this network:

- Teachers improved their **self efficacy for student-centered teaching** to a significant degree.
- Teachers strengthened their **self efficacy for motivating struggling readers to stay engaged with the text** to a highly significant degree.

In year two, across six schools we found:

- Teachers continued to strengthen their **self efficacy for motivating struggling readers to stay engaged with the text** to a highly significant degree.
- Among teachers at the subgroup of three turnaround schools, teachers continued to improve their **self efficacy for student centered teaching** to a significant degree.

(Romer & Barr, 2018)

## Students at Facing History Partner School Rate School Climate Positively

152 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students at a Chicago Partner School responded to a survey designed to research students' experience of school climate.

- 87% of students agreed or strongly agreed that their **teachers expect a lot from them academically.**
- 83% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they have at least one **teacher who cares about them** and helps them.
- 78% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they **fit in at their school.**
- 76% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they **learn important and interesting things** in their classes
- 73% agreed or strongly agreed **“I feel motivated to work hard in school”** (mean score: 4.11 out of 5)

(Barr & Becker, 2018)