

**COURAGE**

**CREATIVITY**

Annual Portfolio  
2020 // 2021

**EQUALITY**  
CHARTER SCHOOL

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**Dear community,**

**Looking back on last year, I am impressed with our courage.** The pandemic plagues us, and we refuse to back down on our commitment to lift each other up. I wonder: where does that courage come from?

**Courage means being honest about things that scare us.** I am scared of a lot of things, including: hate, ignorance, racism, disease, uncertainty. Many of the things I am scared about feel outside of my control. At Equality, our community meets fears with courageous creativity.

**Courage means trying to do something you don't already know how to do.**

Over the past year, each of us became our own IT departments, operations support, time management coaches, nurse practitioners, teachers' aides, social workers, political advocates and inspirational speakers. We had no time for training or preparation. Our scholars felt a skip in the record when it came to school, triggering scary questions in each of us. Could we lose a whole year of learning? What happens to our friendships if we can't be in the same room together? What happens to our economy if we are afraid to go outside? We had the courage to answer these questions, over and over, each day.

**All courage is rooted in creativity.** Our instructional team invented a new system to ensure our scholars get the best possible learning options. Our culture support and dean teams created new ways to connect with families. Together, we created a hybrid program to give families choice. Our PTA created a dynamic forum for voicing parent concerns and lifting up our instructional program. Creativity is the tool that stares down the fear of the unknown.

**The courage and creativity of our community make us unstoppable.**

I am looking forward to the coming year, and I notice one thing I am feeling more than anything else: **hope**.

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Caitlin Franco". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

**Caitlin Franco** — Founder & Executive Director

# keeping us connected

## Socially Distant, but Emotionally Connected!

**A tragic thing about 2020** is that, in striving to keep everyone safe from disease, we faced the possibility of jeopardizing our intellectual and emotional wellbeing. The number one tool that has allowed us to balance these risks is technology. In March of 2020, **Equality quickly accelerated our technology integration plan**, ordering 3 years worth of Chromebooks over a period of weeks to ensure our scholars were able to stay connected to our community, and their own academic and social outcomes. **We supplied WiFi Hotspots** to families whose internet speeds were unreliable. In order to prepare for the Fall Hybrid model, we

purchased classroom video cameras and microphones, striving to ensure that scholars who chose to stay in Remote learning got as much benefit as possible from the live, classroom instruction provided by brave teachers and staff. We vetted and deployed multiple technology solutions to support online safety and high quality instruction, including G-Suite products, PearDeck, GoGuardian and (of course) professional upgrades to our Zoom platform.

**Technology helped us tremendously** in the fight to protect the intellectual and emotional wellbeing of our community as our

culture and support teams did nearly constant outreach and communication to ensure each scholar's needs were heard and addressed.



## Tech Programs and Safety Protocols took center stage.

**Right:** Chizara picked-up her new Chromebook in September 2019, along with her succulent, a symbol of growing together and staying connected.

**Below:** We purchased **700 student chromebooks** since March 2020



# scholars & staff first

**There is no substitute for in-person learning, and no substitute for the courage and creativity of our staff in rising to this year's challenges.**

The physical safety procedures taken to reopen with the Fall Hybrid model also relied on technology improvements, such as air purification systems and touchless digital temperature monitoring. **Our operations staff fought through uncertainty and stress to ensure our facilities were ready to accommodate scholars and staff** who were willing and able to safely return to our buildings.



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## High School

Approximately 49% of our High School scholars returned to classes on October 15th.

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## Middle School

33% of our Middle School families opted for in-person learning, after the DOE building we share was reopened last Fall.

## Four Key Principles for Safely Reopening:

### 1. Understanding risk of community spread in schools.

**Community Spread:** This is when infection moves through an institution, causing uncertainty over how and when infection occurs. In the Fall, NYC DOE worked with the Dept of Health to come up with a threshold of positive cases: schools are to close if the 7 day rolling average was at 3% or greater.

### 2. Reducing Time & Exposure.

**Time & Exposure:** The idea is to reduce time exposed to anyone new (reduce or eliminate mixing between batches of scholars and staff when possible) and to reduce exposure. Since children often have mild symptoms or are asymptomatic, the operational goals aim to reduce time, dose and exposure risk even when viral transmission isn't obvious. Because most of the time, it won't be.



### 3. Batching individual groups and monitoring infection.

**Batching:** This means putting together a group of scholars that only physically interact with each other, and then keeping them in one place as much as possible so that they create less exposure surfaces for a different batch of scholars. An application of this principle is keeping scholars in a homeroom, and then moving teachers between classrooms instead of scholars.

### 4. Proactive outreach.

**Monitoring:** If there are any positive cases in our community, school and public health officials work together on communication to teachers and scholars, with the goal of appropriate follow-through to reduce risk of transmission.

# a year in review

2020  
-  
2021



**95%**

**Next Level Readiness**

We are #1 in our district at preparing middle school students for high school.



**79%**

**Free / Reduced Lunch**

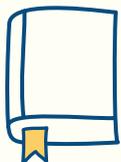
We provide equal opportunities in education to economically disadvantaged communities.



**42%**

**Better Graduations**

Compared to NYC average graduation rates for Students with Disabilities, Equality is the best by far!



**11%**

**Better Regents Results**

Compared to NYC averages on ELA, Math, Science, US and Global History, Equality is unequalled.



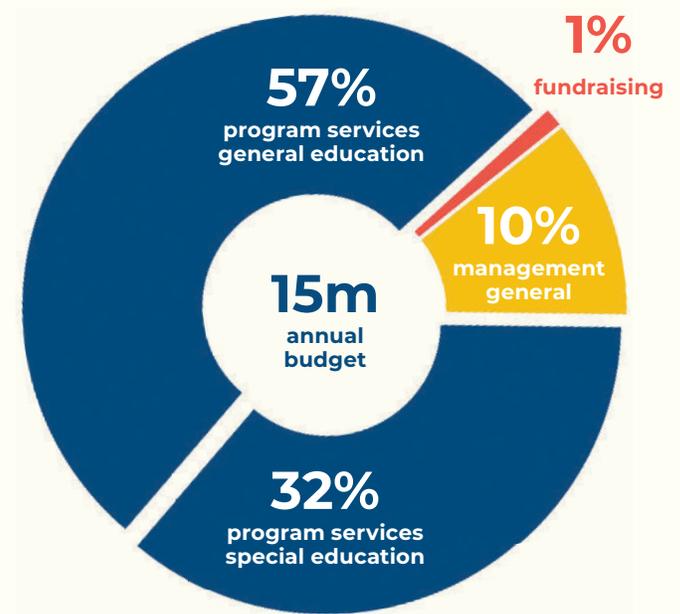
**< 1%**

**Expulsion Rate**

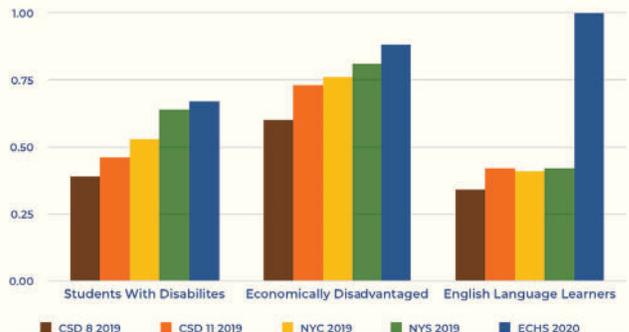
Equality prides itself on having one of the lowest expulsion and long term suspension rates in the state.

**Spend Wisely**

The numbers below show the “functional expense analysis” of our 2020 / 2021 budget.



**Graduation Rates in Scholar Subgroups ECS 2020**

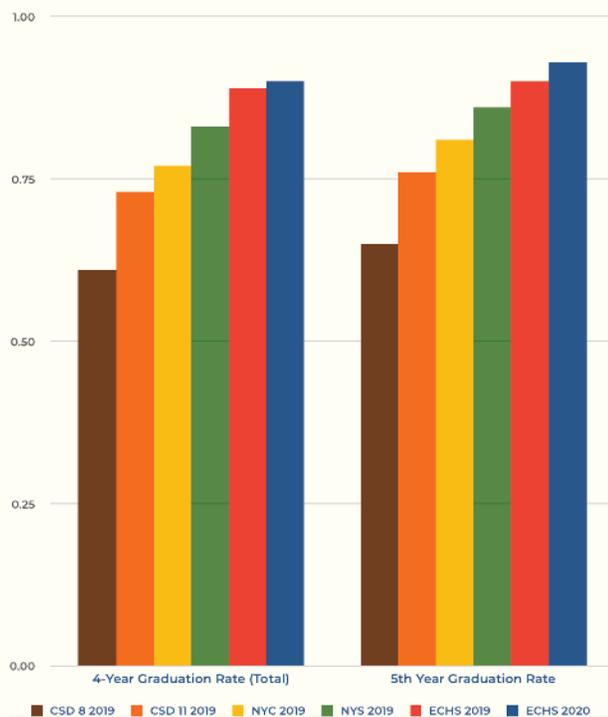


## The trend continues:

- **Scholars do better the longer they stay with us**
- **Our HS success is due to the foundation laid at our MS**

## 2019 & 2020 Graduates

HS scholars from ECMS who attended ECHS graduated at a much higher rate than their City and District counterparts.



## Committed to our staff!

We surveyed staff and conducted focus groups over the summer of 2020 to determine:

- What would make us **feel safe** returning to the building in the Fall?
- What **accommodations** do we need?
- What **concerns** do we have concerning our households/ loved ones?
- What are our expectations regarding **safety and communication**?

We formulated a plan that took into account our staff’s needs in our effort to provide the most effective and safest possible instruction for our scholars. In addition, we offered the following enhanced benefits in 2020-2021:

- **Wellness / meditation** app for all staff
- Upgrades to our **medical benefit**, including a **weight loss program** and increased **mental health offerings**
- **Telemedicine integration** with our health provider/ primary care physicians

## Our stakeholders’ support made 2020 a year worth celebrating!

### A special Shout-out to:

Senator **Jamaal Bailey**  
 Assemblyman **Michael Benedetto**  
 Assemblywoman **Karines Reyes**

Thank you for making time for our scholars!

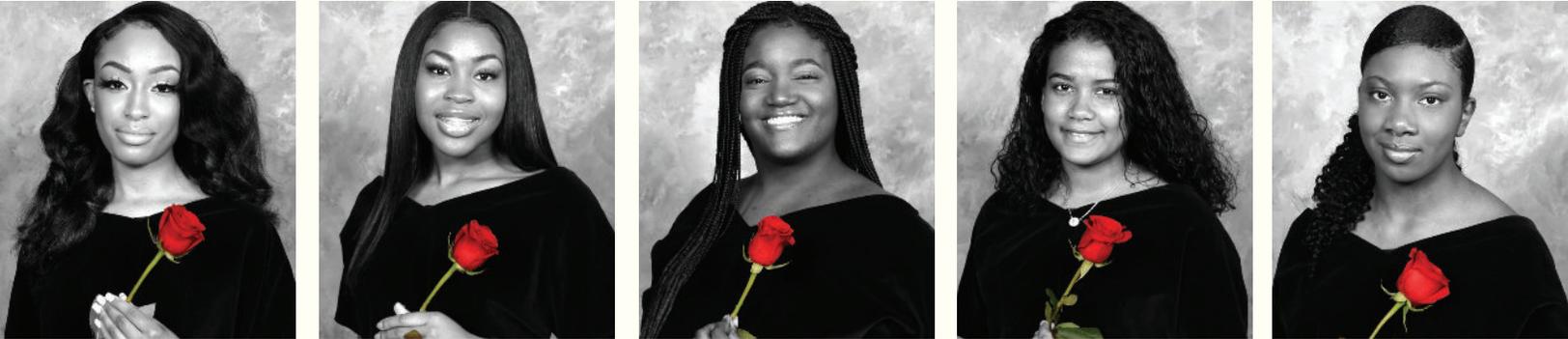
## Staff’s 10 year Anniversary!

**Tracee Black**, Dir. of Ops & Facilities  
**Caitlin Franco**, Exec. Director  
**Amanda Huza**, MS Principal  
**Yvette Miranda**, School Secretary  
**Mandy Myers**, Asst. Principal  
**Favrol Philemy**, HS Principal  
**Donyella Ramsey**, Principal's Assistant

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## Friends of Equality

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**Congratulations to our five very lucky graduates that received scholarships to invest in their futures.**

Founded in 2018 by **Loretta Piscatella** and **Sherman Reid**, **Friends of Equality** offers scholarships to ECS graduates exemplifying our school values. Each year our graduating class can submit a personal essay about how they have incorporated one of our core values (professionalism, integrity, maturity, achievement/progress) into their life. A winner from each group is selected and awarded a check at graduation.

**THIS YEAR'S WINNERS WERE:**

**Tamala Johnson-Dominican College, Zuri Durkins-Baruch College, Jemia Bennet-Buffalo State, Bianca Forchue-Cedeno-BMCC-Borough of Manhattan Community College, Kedra Fowler- SUNY Binghamton.**

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## Thank You To Our Supporters !

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Thank you to our Board members, staff, parents, and alumni for going above and beyond!

**Annual Appeal**  
**Raised \$19,400**

(goal was \$15,000)

We always had a goal to expand our technology for a 1:1 computer program but the circumstances of this year pushed up the deadline to meet this goal.

Thanks to the funding of both of these wonderful foundations, we were able to provide Chromebooks to 100% of our scholars and WiFi hotspots to those in need.

**Sexauer Foundation**  
**\$45,000**

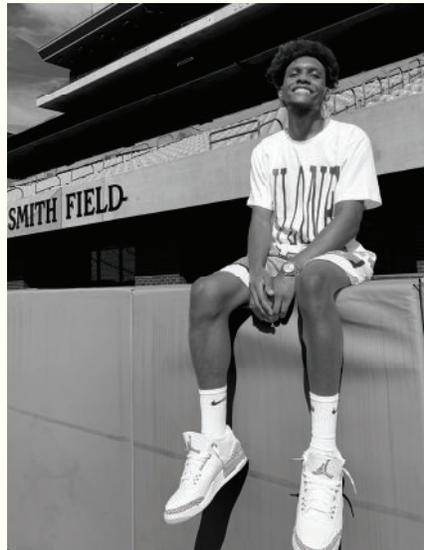
**The Hyde & Watson Foundation**  
**\$20,000**

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## Scholar Profile

**We celebrate that each scholar has unique talents, needs, goals and challenges; Moreover, we stand in awe of the beauty of their growth on different paths.**

When **Nicholas Fantuzzi** transferred to Equality in December 2015, he only found out the night before that he would be starting a new school. He was not happy to say the least. Despite not having time to let the news sink in he quickly became acclimated, making friends, forming bonds with teachers and doing well academically. He graduated with a 3.0 GPA and planned to attend Bronx Community College. While at BCC he had a full course load taking up to 7 classes a semester. He was also part of 5 extracurricular activities, a mentor to high school students, a Kaplan Scholar, a summer teacher's assistant at Columbia University, a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and an employee at Foot Action. Nicholas hustled and put all of his efforts into making "something of himself." His hard work paid off, he graduated from Bronx Community College



with a 3.8 GPA and acceptances to 22 Universities including Howard, USC, NYU, LSU, University of Michigan. Nicholas chose to continue his journey at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

Nicholas wanted to be clear about something, "What people see is the success but what they don't see is the trials and tribulations that I had to overcome." After suffering the loss of his grandmother, the "biggest supporter of his educational endeavors," and having to move out of his family home just a few days before

leaving for UNC, Nicholas was feeling low and lacking motivation. Then, we found ourselves in unprecedented times facing a worldwide pandemic and racial injustice. "I turned down jobs and internships because I couldn't handle it. I was at an all time low emotionally. Despite all the bad that has happened this past year and throughout my life, God blessed me with so much support and love from many people. This past semester I had the opportunity to speak on mental health panels and I was still able to be a mentor and a spokesman from my previous college despite leaving. I met some great people at UNC and am part of the Black Student Movement there. I am looking forward to this upcoming semester. **Thank you to Equality for contributing to the student I am today, for nurturing me and helping me grow from a young boy into a man.**"



History has shown us that courage can be contagious, and hope can take on a life of its own.”

— Michelle Obama

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Bronx, NY 10473

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East Bronx, NY 10475

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