rising to the moment
Empowering Youth to End Social Isolation

Dear Friends,

Thanks to all of you, this has been a remarkable year of growth and achievement for Beyond Differences®. As thought leaders and practitioners, we continue working every day to end social isolation and build cultures of belonging as we have for over a decade.

In the pages ahead, you will read about the major impact our programs delivered this year on a large scale. You will also see the profound effect that we have on the lives of the young people, teachers, and school communities that we serve.

Of particular note, you will learn about our National Teen Board expanding to become a truly national group of diverse high school youth blazing the trail as subject-matter experts in transforming cultures in middle schools. It’s a joy to help strengthen their natural leadership qualities and to support them as they use their voices and grassroots organizing skills to build cultures of belonging - through our curricula development and activism.

We are tremendously proud of our existing programs and reach in over 9,000 schools across America since our founding. However, we must do more. Because of the heightened impact of social isolation in our post-pandemic world, we have also taken major strides this year to build our organizational capacity to meet the increased needs for the coming decade.

With the rise of social isolation and increased recognition of its role in mental and behavioral health issues, including acts of violence towards self and others, there couldn’t be a more important time for Beyond Differences® to be seen and heard.

The time is now for Beyond Differences® to accelerate our mission and expand our reach to serve more students. Not only do our schools need this... Our workplaces need this. Our country needs this. The world needs this.

Thank you for being a champion for our work. We wouldn’t be the change agents we are without you.

Laura Talmus
Executive Director and Co-Founder

Wade Rakes
Board Chair

Our Impact

9,000+ Schools
50 States
4.5+ Million Students Reached
In the pursuit to end social isolation, our No One Eats Alone® program addresses one of the most vital ingredients a middle school student can have at a lunch or social setting – a welcoming seat at the table next to friends.

Motivated by one young woman’s isolating experience of eating alone, the program includes activities, ice breakers, and ideas to plan a celebration of connection and friendship at school to build a culture where everyone feels welcome.

Centered around the theme *Setting a Place at the Table*, this year’s No One Eats Alone® curriculum included modules on the power of self-reflection, the language of emotions, how to apologize, and why apologies matter.

No One Eats Alone® Day was celebrated on February 18th this year. Toolkits were distributed to schools with paper plates and elements to decorate. Students were invited to put on their plate something they wanted to celebrate about themselves and how they might help create a culture of belonging at their school.

Learn more
www.NoOneEatsAlone.org
No One Eats Alone®

Setting a place at the table
Know Your Classmates

1,412 Schools Participated
706,000 Students Connected

Understanding and celebrating differences
The Know Your Classmates® program invites inclusion through identity exploration. This aspect of social-emotional learning is foundational for understanding and celebrating differences.

Developing awareness, acceptance, and respect for a youth’s own identity, tradition, and culture enables youth to extend the same understanding and compassion to their classmates. From this place of understanding, differences can bring students together.

This year’s curriculum focus was on ending racism and featured an art project called LEARN—Let’s End All Racism Now. The art activity was based on the children’s book, *The Skin You Live In*, written by award-winning children’s author and friend of Beyond Differences®, Michael Tyler, and published by the Chicago Children’s Museum.

In October of 2021, three of our National Teen Board Members had the honor of sitting down with a US government leader for a discussion about how the pandemic and distance learning affected them and their classmates. The livestream event was viewed by thousands of students and teachers around the world.

Learn more
www.KnowYourClassmates.org

“Developing awareness, acceptance, and respect for a youth’s own identity, tradition, and culture enables youth to extend the same understanding and compassion to their classmates.”
In the spirit of empowering students to become agents for cultural change, Be Kind Online® is an original school-based social-emotional learning program that reaches beyond the classroom walls into the digital space. The program equips youth with awareness and tools to create compassionate and inclusive virtual spaces to address the rising issue of social isolation online.

Be Kind Online® Day is held annually in May before summer break when the lack of daily classroom interaction means the primary social interaction and the continuation of friendships for many students may now take place online.

1,482 Schools Participated
741,000 Students Empowered

Be Kind
With the proliferation of digital technology in the classroom, social media outlets, and handheld technology, the amount of time youth spend in digital spaces increases each year. Add to that the physical isolation of the pandemic driving more education and interaction to take place online, the challenge of preventing social isolation in the online space has become ever present.

For the first time, the National Teen Board participated in writing the Be Kind Online® curriculum. They chose to address the steep rise in microaggressions on social media. The new student leadership unit helps students become online heroes and tap into their superpowers to create a culture of acceptance and belonging online.

Learn more
www.BeKindOnlineDay.org
Youth Lead the Way
with our National Teen Board

As a student-led social justice movement, Beyond Differences® looks to the youth who are involved to guide and shape everything that we do. High school students who have just been through the challenging middle school years are well equipped to serve as subject matter experts. This approach ensures that the curriculum and programs we develop are relevant and engaging for the youth that we serve in today's classrooms.

The National Teen Board (NTB) expanded in 2021 from a local group of students to becoming truly national and beyond. The board now represents 8 states, is much more socioeconomically diverse, and includes all types of sexual orientation, cultural backgrounds, race, students with disabilities, non-English speaking students, and more.

The NTB strives to be as diverse as the schools that participate in our programs. These passionate high school activists use their voices and grassroots organizing skills to create cultures of belonging in many ways, including the tools and curriculum that we develop.

Designed to expand the reach and diversity of Beyond Differences® youth leaders, the board's pilot year took place during the 2021-2022 school year where together they developed many goals and ultimately landed on 5 priority groups:

- Disability/Visibility
- Refugee/Immigrant Visibility
- Queer Visibility
- Stop Asian and Pacific Islander hate
- Allyship/Intersectional group*

*This last group will work on the intersectionality of the other groups and effective partnership, and most importantly ensures allyship.

Learn more
BeyondDifferences.org/national-teen-board
“I support Beyond Differences® because as a queer and trans youth, I have had my own firsthand experiences with social isolation. I know how hard it is to feel alienated from your peers, and how valuable it is when you find a space where you feel like you belong. Beyond Differences® has been that space for me, and I want to help work to build even more inclusive communities, especially in our schools, so that every other kid has the chance to feel supported, valued, and important.”

MATTEO DIAZ
San Francisco Bay Area
National Teen Board Member
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“Beyond Differences® gave me the tools and community I needed to validate my authentic self and build the power I needed to deconstruct systems of hatred and build inclusive spaces across the nation.”

FAYYAZ
National Teen Board
Kalamazoo, MI
A Sound Investment

Beyond Differences® strives to make every dollar count as we empower youth on a path to building cultures of belonging and ending social isolation. We are especially grateful to our major donors who help make our programs happen.

As always, we are so grateful to Centene Charitable Foundation for sponsoring our annual program, No One Eats Alone®. Centene was our earliest major financial supporter and has allowed us to grow the program from a few hundred schools in a handful of states to over 2500 in all 50 states. This year the Koret Foundation, The Louis L. Borick Foundation, and the Cigna Foundation sponsored professional development for teachers. Our programs and curricula were also supported thanks to government contracts from Orange County’s Department of Education, New York City’s Department of Education, and Marin County Office of Education.

Truly showcasing its theme Rising to the Moment, our annual Spring Gala exceeded goals. We increased revenue from the prior year by 132%. We raised a total of $620,000 thanks to a donor match for the fund-a-need.

The organization was able to increase staffing this year to prepare for growth. We hired Sally Matsuishi to become Director of National Youth Programs. We also launched our National Teen Board, transitioning from four regional programs to one national board. We grew the staff to 12 including new hiring assistance for each director. We were able to accomplish all of this while holding down office expenses with all staff working remotely.

AWARD RECOGNITION

Millions of funders utilize the Candid Guidestar platform to review a nonprofit organization’s profile. Earning the gold seal of transparency is a proud achievement, and we are pleased to again earn this recognition. https://www.guidestar.org
Leadership

Our Board of Directors give generously of their time to guide Beyond Differences® with their expertise from various backgrounds. This amazing group of individuals also donates to the organization and this year there was 100% participation.

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“Thanks to Beyond Differences®, we were able to provide training for our teachers and scale the wellness programs that serve our five schools. The equine session helps students develop social-emotional skills like emotional awareness, self-confidence, trust, and empathy.”

KERRIE JACKSON
Director of Network Culture
Gestalt Schools
Memphis, TN
Knowledgeable and engaged teachers are key to implementing our youth-focused programming. Offering social-emotional learning (SEL) curricula that meets the demands of teachers and the needs of students is critical to our success. This is why we hold space in our programming for professional development for teachers.

Last year, thanks to the Healthier Kids for Our Future® grant from the Cigna Foundation, a research study tracked the efficacy of a Beyond Differences® professional development training to help develop participants’ ability to support LGBTQ+ students in the classroom and the wider school community. The results showed that strategies and tools gained during Professional Development were tangible and immediately able to be implemented in schools.

- 94% of educators implemented professional development strategies
- 3,700 students were supported in classrooms
- 1,650 students were supported individually
- 25% of the students reached reported using strategies gained from professional development regularly
- 33% used them several times

As a result of this grant, Beyond Differences® sought to reach teachers and students in areas where access to social-emotional learning may not be available locally. This led to the creation of the Beyond Differences® Learning Community online platform. In this online space, educators will come together regularly to learn, share and help each other with SEL, mental health, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) knowledge. As a community, they will develop best practices for positioning students as thought leaders in SEL and equity work.

Learn more
BeyondDifferences.org/professional-development
Thank You!

We are grateful to the following individuals, companies, and foundations who have supported Beyond Differences®. They have invested $250 or more in our student leaders and school programs.*

*The list reflects contributions received between July 1, 2021 and June 30, 2022.

Learn more
BeyondDifferences.org/funders-friends

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Victoria Pollock
William Hill
William Roland
Beyond Differences® mission is to inspire students nationwide to end social isolation and create cultures of belonging for everyone. We envision a world where all youth are accepted, valued, and included no matter their differences.

Join the Movement to End Social Isolation!