



Difference Makers

Celebrating 5 Years of High School Student College-Readiness via Academic Service-Learning at Susan Wagner, Tottenville, and Curtis High Schools.

Director William Riesel, Ph.D. Professor of Management, St. John's University

Over the Bridge Plan for 12 New Schools



Difference Makers is a college-readiness program for high school students in the NYC Department of Education Community Schools initiative taught by professors at St. John's University. Students in the program are learning valuable leadership skills as they study and respond to social issues in the community and partner with active not-for-profit organizations. This report identifies the outcomes that are assisting the NYC DOE's Community Schools Initiative over the past five years and the moving-forward scaling objectives of this unique Academic Service-Learning Program. View the recording of the Fifth Annual Certificate of Completion Ceremony, February 8, 2021.¹

Principal of Susan E. Wagner High School, **David Cugini**, presented the Keynote Speech at the February 8, 2021 Fifth Annual Certificate of Completion Ceremony, and was the recipient of the Difference Makers First *Educator of the Year Award*



'The evidence of learning is in the application of that learning in the real world. Service-learning provides our students a competence to seek change and it teaches compassion and empathy. I think we can all agree that we need more humanity in the world. Many Difference Makers past and present have cited their involvement in the program as a defining element of their development and an inspiration to continue to make an impact during their lifetimes. The students showed passion and resiliency and were dedicated to serving interests greater than themselves. After seeing the students' impact in the community, they will not settle for less.'

Students reflect on their experiences:

'Being a 2020-2021 Difference Maker inspired me to help others around me who need support. Before Difference Makers, I felt as if I did not really have a role. After taking part in this program, I feel as if I made a difference by donating to and helping the not-for-profit organizations. I learned how to work with others and be collaborative in my group. I made connections with students who had the same inspiration for helping others. It was truly an amazing experience that taught me how to be involved in my community during this challenging time in the world.'

Tottenville High School Student Reflection February, 2021





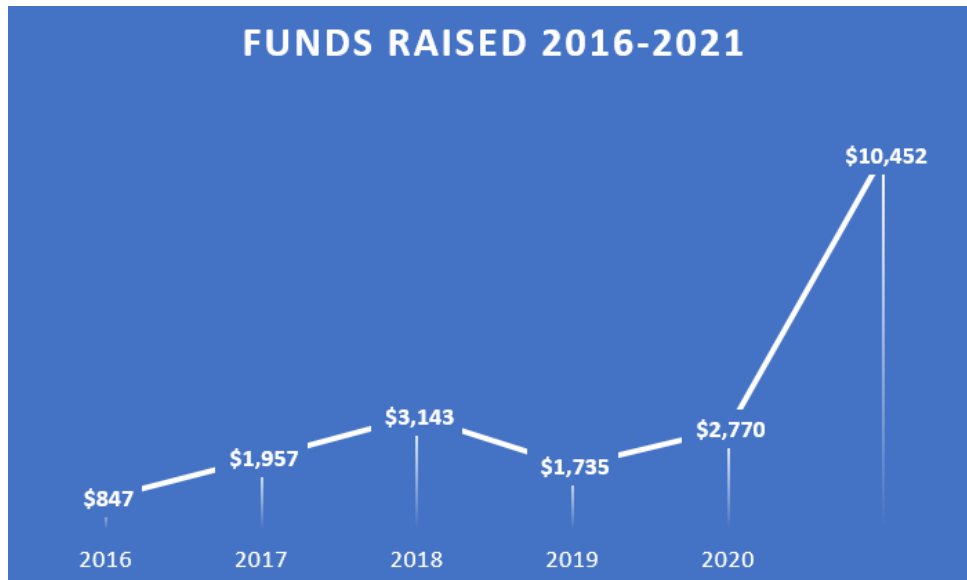
Verrazano Bridge to the next four Boroughs!

'I want you guys to be aware of the inspiration you have been to the community, to me, and to your parents. I see you as the giants of this game just in the same way as Malala or Greta Thunberg. You are at the beginning of your careers of truly making a difference in your communities and beyond. I heard one student say it is the beginning of a lifetime of service and that is the right thing to do.'



Ron Banks, Curtis High School Teacher on February 8, 2021

Highlights 2016-2021: Certificates Conferred and Fundraising Totals



Difference Makers participate in fundraising and proceeds are donated 100 percent to the many NFP organizations that we partner with each year. The total raised and donated over five years is now \$10,452.



DIRECTOR'S REFLECTION

Difference Makers was fashioned out of student passions

St. John's University holds **service as a core value** and faculty can be found all throughout New York contributing in small and large ways. We do it because that is who we are. Five years ago, I visited Susan Wagner High School on 1200 Manor Road in Staten Island, NY to talk about leadership. I had a PowerPoint deck and went through the current characteristics of what it takes to be a leader. **One of the things that great leaders do is that they invest in their people and inspire them to excel as human beings, not just workers.** By accident, I asked the students in the groups I met, if they might like to do a college-type project with me to study real needs at real not-for-profit organizations. It shocked me when the signup sheet came back with 60 signatures and 60 email addresses out of 65 students. Little did I know that students need service hours to graduate and they were interested in doing their service with a college professor. So began the Difference Makers in the fall of 2016 when we started meeting students after school to work on our very first Academic Service-Learning project. But what happened that year will never fail to amaze me. Students had come into the program with transactional goals to earn service hours. But by the time we celebrated the completion of their projects when the students shared their experiences, a very different mindset had replaced their transactional motivations. **They had been transformed by the work.** The students partnered with the Central Family Life Center (CFLC), a north-shore NFP, and studied after school tutoring for children at an underserved area of the Island. They designed a manual of on-line tutoring and raised \$847 to pay for a Skype-ready computer which was donated to the CFLC. You could see something exciting and new had overtaken the Falcons of Susan Wagner. I will tell you why I know that. We asked the high school teacher, Jennifer Brogan, who attended every meeting, to say a few words. I will never forget how tears came to her eyes and it took a moment before she got out the words to say how proud she was of our first 31 Difference Makers. What I saw then happens over and over in each of the five years Difference Makers have worked in the community. Difference Makers teaches our young future leaders how to take charge of complicated issues and by doing so they learn the gift of lifetime Difference Making. What I have seen tells me that the successes on Staten Island are just one bridge away from what could happen on the four other NYC Boroughs. After teaching 314 students over 5 years how to make a difference and to distinguish themselves for waiting colleges, the next step in our journey is the Verrazano Bridge to the rest of New York.

Difference Makers and NYC DOE Community Schools



Difference Makers Fourth Annual Certificate of Completion Ceremony and Dinner on January 29, 2020.

There are many choices for CBOs, but few are led by college professors who are not only delivering service but also putting it to the test with scholarly analysis. The Difference Makers pedagogy of Academic Service-Learning was recognized in 2020 at the USASBE National Conference in New Orleans as a finalist for “Excellence in Pedagogical Innovation”². A book chapter on Difference Makers was published in January of 2021 and empirical research is ongoing that demonstrates the effectiveness of Difference Makers in the college-success of graduates of the program³. The program is a direct contribution of the **Office of Civic Engagement at St. John’s University** led by Vice Provost Dr. James O’Keefe and Associate Provost Dr. Robert Fanuzzi. The leadership of the university stands behind community engagement through the community-based organization framework which is central to the pillars of the New York DOE commitment to community schooling. According to Maier et al. (2017)⁴, there are four founding pillars of community schooling:

1. Integrated student support
2. Expanded learning time and opportunities
3. Family and community engagement
4. Collaborative leadership and practice

Difference Makers touches on all four pillars, but it is Pillars 2-4 where the most impact is clear. Difference Makers meet after school hours, so it is an expanded learning time (**Pillar 2**); the Academic Service-Learning pedagogy involves students in the community learning about not-for-profits, side-by-side with college professors, and encouraging parents to attend our culminating certificate ceremonies (**Pillar 3**); and the model of partnering with teachers, principals, guidance counselors on this journey as students meet and build trust with professors from a university (**Pillar 4**).

What the Four Pillars of Community Schools Look Like In Action



Excerpted from Maier et al., 2017

Difference Makers fit with the Community Schools Initiative

The Community Schooling strategic plan⁵ (2017) identified four **core student outcomes** for this new schooling model.

1. Increased attendance and student engagement
2. Greater connectedness to adults and classmates in their schools
3. Development of social and emotional skills necessary for success
4. Improved academic performance

Outcome 1. Students hit outcome 1 because they are encouraged and required to attend all after-school meetings.

Outcome 2. Students achieve outcome 2 because they are supervised by high school teachers and led in their AS-L projects by college professors. The engagements with adult teachers and college professors builds awareness of success in high school and introduces skills for success at the university-level.

Outcome 3. Students' interactions with leaders from important not-for-profit organizations and their study of critical social issues, helps them to gain leadership and group collaborative skills consistent with outcome 3. Importantly, the Difference Makers promotes collegiality and joint effort on AS-L projects with teams composed of students from multiple different high schools.

Outcome 4 is currently being studied by a research project into experiences of program participants after leaving for college. Preliminary data shows students go to college and demonstrate collaborative skills, are comfortable assuming leadership roles, and are committed to life-long service.

New York City commissioned a report to study the outcomes related to Community Schooling and a comprehensive report by the Rand Corporation was released in 2020 with definitive evidence supporting the effectiveness of Community Schools.⁶

Academic Service-Learning: Our Nationally Recognized Pedagogy

The students are empowered to understand issues by taking on research projects that attempt to solve critical social issues in collaboration with primarily local not-for-profit organizations. Difference Makers have studied food insecurity with City Harvest and Meals on Wheels, immigration with Make the Road NY, pet rescue with Pluto Rescue, childhood development with Children's Aid, HIV orphan's education in Zambia with American Friends of Cecily's Fund, anti-gang violence with True 2 Life, children's cancer with St. Jude's Hospital and Sunrise Day Camp, and environmental stewardship with the Greenbelt Conservancy. Students decide from among up to five projects which one they will work on during the program which lasts from mid-fall to early in the following year (about 12 weeks meeting once weekly). At the meetings, students begin to construct visual presentations of their findings and suggested solutions. NFP leaders visit with the students to coach approximately 2-4 times with students working towards rehearsals and receiving final guidance. Difference Makers prioritizes student-led social action/service-learning projects that foster critical thinking, positive attitudes toward school, and increased civic engagement.⁷ The culminating evening features the student presentations in front of the professors and college administrators as well as the high school teachers, principals, superintendents, parents, and the sponsors. Because of the need to socially distance in 2020-2021, the entire program switched from a face-to-face after school program to a virtual (Microsoft Teams) program meeting after school electronically. The technology helped reduce NFP leaders travel commitments and afforded students the opportunity to view missed meetings which were recorded and posted on the Teams platform. The collaborative outcome was greatly enhanced through virtual technology and the best evidence of the program comes from viewing the February 8, 2021 Difference Makers Fifth Annual Certificate of Completion Ceremony, viewable on Vimeo: [CLICK HERE to VIEW](#).

The culminating requirement of the Difference Makers is for students to state in 100 words or less their experience *reflection* including what they liked or might like to improve. This *information* is studied so we can respond to the needs of our students. One Curtis High School student wrote:

"Being a 2020-2021 Difference Maker has taught me that being connected and inclined with my community is important. Not only did I learn about different problems on Staten Island, but I also learned about children in Zambia, Africa. I learned to fundraise and put myself out there for a good cause. This program opened my eyes to see how I can help change the world, starting with my community. I made friends with people in different schools and even people I did not know in my own school. Difference Makers gives you the knowledge and awareness that no other program can."

Two of our NFP Partners



'Iron' Mike Perry, Director of True 2 Life Anti-gang violence program. Mike leads a team of violence interrupters on Staten Island modeled on the Cure Violence Initiative in Chicago. They "risk lives to save lives."

'I am extremely grateful. Thank you for your support! Thanks to the Difference Makers. We truly appreciate our friendship and partnership and are looking forward to continued collaboration.'



Sue Skaf of American Friends of Cecily's Fund congratulates Difference Makers on supporting the education of HIV Orphans in Zambia

'Your generous support will fund a program to deliver food to the villages because the schools are closed because of COVID where the students normally get their meals'.

GROWING FUTURE LEADERS



The Difference Makers program has concluded five years of successful collaboration with the Community Schools Initiative of New York. Our nationally recognized pedagogy is supporting the development and success of New York City's most underserved students. Based on our ongoing research with college students who completed the Difference Makers, the skills of leadership, collaboration, and college-readiness carry over to student success in college. Students report they are committed to life-long service.

As we take stock of the past five years, the goal now is to continue this journey and to serve larger numbers of students each year. Our ["Over the Bridge Plan for 12 New Schools"](#) is designed to expand our capacity to serve more Community Schools within the unreached 4 boroughs. To do this, we will continue to leverage the foundational university/community partnership that has partnered the NYC DOE with the Difference Makers and our network of world-class not-for-profit organizations. The outcomes of the program align with the Community Schools priorities:

- Increased attendance and student engagement
- Greater connectedness to adults and classmates in their schools
- Development of social and emotional skills necessary for success
- Improved academic performance

The learning community of CBO/Teachers/College Professors/NPF Leaders exposes students to many levels of professional support and fosters planning about next steps into college. The student-centered learning approach permits ample time for discovery and casual conversations between students and professors about the upcoming college experience. Students venture twice to a college campus during the program, once at the outset, for orientation and, secondly, at the culminating certificate of completion ceremony. The colleges provide helpful guidance to students seeking scholarships and information about admissions and high-ranking admissions officers share 'no-pressure' presentations about requirements and expectations at college. Difference Makers has become a college-readiness program because it lowers entry barriers and addresses concerns students may have about what college is like. After 12 weeks in Difference Makers, many students get to know a college professor and are very comfortable asking for letters of recommendation, helpful hints, and programmatic questions.

One of our near-term priorities is to partner with university admissions' offices to gain access to attendance scholarships for participation in Difference Makers. Difference Makers reveals something about the character of our students that test scores and grade point average do not. It reveals what is in a student's heart. Participation in Difference Makers can be a defining element in college acceptance. Over 70 percent of Difference Makers applicants to the St. John's University class of 2020 were accepted.



**District 31 Superintendent, Vincenza Gallasio,
Attendee February 8, 2021 Certificate Ceremony**



'You do not have to be in the top 5 percentile, rich, or come from a certain neighborhood. Service is the great leveler. You served and represented a great 150-year tradition of service at St. John's University.'

Dr. Robert Fanuzzi, Associate Provost, St. John's University, on February 8, 2021

PARTNERING WITH TEACHERS

Jennifer Brogan of Susan Wagner's Academy of Finance has worked 5 years with Difference Makers and received the Difference Makers Teacher of the Year Award on February 8, 2021



FUNDING NEEDS



Difference Makers has received annual support from a host of public/private funders, donors, and St. John’s University and has raised over \$100,000 for programming since 2017. The *Over the Bridge Plan to 12 New Schools* will appeal to a combination of these same funding sources and additional sources. Staffing and administration to support this capacity building initiative will be the single most important additional factor to achieve the goal of 12 new Community Schools, 3 on each borough. Since the outset, the program cost has been \$318 per child inclusive of all service delivery, administration, catering, marketing, printing, travel, and in-kind gifts from St. John’s for facilities, information technology support, and rental costs. As we build capacity, our administrative and service delivery costs will increase and our per child costs will increase somewhat to \$495, still well below the average costs of services for CBOs in the Community Schools initiative. We anticipate jumping from an average of 75 students (average for 2018, 2019, 2020) to 450 students at 15 schools in cohorts of 30 students per school. Below are the program delivery components⁹.

1100	Direct Service and Administration
3100	Event Management/Food and Facilities
3500	Travel
3700	Promotional Materials and Printing

Funding Sources



Con Edison, The Staten Island Foundation, Northfield Bank Foundation, Nationalgrid, Richmond County Savings Foundation, NYC Department of Education, St. John’s Office of Academic Service-Learning, Joel and Annette Laitman Family, Office of St. John’s Staten Island Vice Provost, and VISA Faculty Research Consortium Grant.

A formal budget for our *Over the Bridge Plan to 12 New Schools* will be presented upon request.

BIOGRAPHY DR. WILLIAM REISEL

Dr. William Reisel is a full professor of management at the Tobin College of Business and is the Department of Management's **Assistant Chairperson**. He began working for St. John's in 1998 after receiving a Ph.D. in management and strategy from the City University of New York. Dr. Reisel is a world-recognized scholar about employee job insecurity, attitudes, and strategy. He has over 60 scholarly publications and conference presentations during his career with more than 1,400 scholarly citations to his credit. Dr. Reisel is a passionate teacher who uses Academic Service-Learning with his students. His work received the **2018 Presidential Academic Service-Learning Award**. In 2018, Dean Norean Sharpe appointed Dr. Reisel the **Tobin Director of Accreditation** and he led the successful AACSB Business Re-accreditation Report effort beginning in May of 2018 and ending in January of this 2019. Among his other roles, Dr. Reisel serves as the Director of the newly launched **MS in Entrepreneurship and Innovation** and he directs the annual **James and Eileen Christmas Business Plan Competition**. Dr. Reisel is a third-year **Vincentian Fellow** and presented a talk in April 2019 entitled "The Mission of Difference Makers." The talk focused on a high school 'college-readiness' program Dr. Reisel directs at three high schools on Staten Island that supports student credentials for college applications based on service-driven partnerships with not-for-profits in New York City. Multiple prestigious institutions have supported Difference Makers including the NY DOE End of School Day grant and from multiple private foundations: Con Edison, Staten Island Foundation, Richmond Savings Foundation, National Grid, and the Northfield Bank Foundation. Dr. Reisel was recognized by his colleagues with the **Tobin College Beta Gamma Sigma "Professor of the Year Award"** in 2019 and the **Beta Alpha Psi "Professor of the Year Award"** in 2018.

Dr. Reisel email: reiselw@stjohns.edu

For more on Difference Makers, please see news coverage at the following Media weblinks:

<https://www.silive.com/news/2019/10/st-johns-university-collaborates-with-local-high-schoolers-to-make-a-difference.html>

<https://www.stjohns.edu/about/news/2020-02-06/2019-2020-difference-makers-program-concludes-its-impact-continues>

<https://www.stjohns.edu/about/news/2018-09-06/tobin-professor-receives-prestigious-award-academic-service-learning-work>

<https://www.torchonline.com/news/2018/10/03/professor-wins-prestigious-as-l-award/>

<https://www.stjohns.edu/about/news/2018-02-06/difference-makers-completion-ceremony>



COLLEGES ATTENDED BY DIFFERENCE MAKERS

 <p>ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY</p>	 <p>Drexel UNIVERSITY</p>	 <p>College of Staten Island The City University of New York</p>
<p>BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK</p>	<p>BaruchCOLLEGE</p>	<p>RIT</p>
 <p>SETON HALL UNIVERSITY</p>	<p>STEVENS INSTITUTE of TECHNOLOGY THE INNOVATION UNIVERSITY®</p>	<p>HUNTER</p>
<p>Quinnipiac UNIVERSITY</p>	<p>JOHN JAY COLLEGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE</p>	<p>PENNSYLVANIA COLLEGE of HEALTH SCIENCES</p>
<p>ADELPHI UNIVERSITY NEW YORK</p>		

WATCH OUR FIFTH ANNUAL CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION CEREMONY, FEB. 8, 2021



Vimeo Link to the Recording	CLICK HERE to VIEW
Invocation Patrick Griffin	2:25
Vice Provost Dr. James O'Keefe	5:00
Dean Noreen Sharpe	7:30
Keynote Speaker Principal David Cugini	30:41
Not for Profit Partners	41:50
Students' Project: Meals on Wheels Presentation	51:30
Students' Project: American Friends of Cecily's Fund	58:00
Students' Project: The Greenbelt Conservancy	1hr:14
Students' Project: True 2 Life	1hr:25
Certificates of Completion	1hr:33
Closing Associate Provost Dr. Robert Fanuzzi	1hr:40.45

REFERENCES

¹ Fifth Annual Certificate of Completion Ceremony on Vimeo: [CLICK HERE to VIEW](#)

² USASBE 2020 National Conference, New Orleans, LA: <https://www.usasbe.org/general/custom.asp?page=2020conference>.

³ Reisel, W. D., Fanuzzi, R. (2021). Difference Makers for College Readiness. Annals of Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy – 2021. Annals of Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy – 2021/Edward Elgar. <https://www.elgar.com/shop/usd/catalog/product/view/id/16827/>

⁴ Maier, A., Daniel, J. and Oakes, J. (2017). Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy A Review of the Evidence. Learning Policy Institute of the National Education Policy Center.

⁵ New York City Community Schools Strategic Plan (2017).

⁶ Johnston, W. R., Engberg, J., Opper, I. M., Sontag-Padilla, L, and Xenakis, L (2020). Illustrating the Promise of Community Schools: An Assessment of the Impact of the New York City Community Schools Initiative. Rand Corporation.

⁷ National Center for Community Schools (2014). Leading with Purpose and Passion: A Guide for Community Schools Directors, p. 31.

⁸ Microsoft Teams is a video conferencing software that permits screen sharing, file sharing, meeting recordings and is linked to the Microsoft ecosystem of programs and applications. Our adoption of Microsoft teams has enabled us to engage more frequently with our NFP leaders who visited meetings every third or fourth meeting during the 12-week program. The Teams platform provided additional benefits via recordings of meetings so that students with conflicts could view the meeting and receive credit for service hours. One of the major benefits of Teams in 2020-2021 was that students in three different schools could work collaboratively on AS-L projects as means of breaking down inter-school rivalries and enhancing understanding among diverse student learners.

⁹ Numbers in parenthesis are from NYC Contract Reporting Categories