In a year full of challenges, Embarc worked to flip the narrative around schools by building space for joy. We view joy not as a way to escape the injustices around us, but as a practice for movement building, for transforming the systems we know don’t serve our young people, and for revolutionizing how we teach and learn.

Our Aspiration
Friends,

As the nation continued to adjust to an ever-changing pandemic, Embarc was hard at work fostering a sense of belonging through in-person experiences. Evolution of these kinds of mindsets can lead to better physical and mental health even in the face of trauma, and Embarc has long known that experiential learning opportunities and moments of joy have a profound healing effect on students. The deep changes we started to see this year within school communities let us know we’re on the right path for greater change within our school system.

This past school year, word of our work continued to spread throughout Chicago Public Schools, and Embarc was able to answer the call of CPS high schools who’ve been knocking on our doors for years asking for our programming. Thanks to your support, we launched 7 new Whole Schools, creating a total of 11,206 individual student experiences and 45,000 human-to-human interactions. More importantly, the quality of our work and feedback was so high that school leadership continued to take note, putting us in a position of growing interest and commitment.

This year we saw our communities evolve and helped them imagine how they can restructure the day, the week, the year, to accommodate more of Embarc’s teaching and methodology. Schools transformed bell schedules, teacher training, and curricula to better serve their students. The work that we’ve been piloting is now growing and evolving, and what once started as a collection of ephemeral ideas is now turning into progress backed by data-tracking growth mindset, agency, sense of belonging, relationships, and exposure.

What we saw this year was a blossoming of what is possible, and we are excited to build new and broader partnerships. None of this work would be possible without your thoughtful support, which is key to our growth and expansion. Thank you for your trust in our vision. We’re looking forward to another year of growth and learning, and I can’t wait for you to join us along the way.

We couldn’t do it without you.

With hope,

Imran Khan
CEO and Co-Founder
A Return to In-Person Experiences

October 2021 marked Embarc’s first in-person experiences in almost two years. While many students returned to the classroom with uncertainties and anxieties, Embarc provided space to center collaboration, relationship building, and joy. Each Embarc experience is designed to provide our young people with positive healing experiences that ultimately serve their emotional well-being and provide identity-affirming moments. We can’t undo the trauma students experienced during the pandemic, but through Embarc, we have nearly unlimited opportunity to provide them with positive healing experiences that will serve them in school and beyond.

Knowing that many of our young people craved opportunities to build deeper relationships, Embarc’s programming team focused on designing journeys that helped build developmental relationships and social-emotional skills in joyous ways.

In the 11,000+ individual student experiences we created this year, students explored circus moves with CirCEsteem, practiced yoga and meditation with BAAM Yoga, blew glass with Ignition Community Glass, busted some moves with Bollywood Groove, learned about entrepreneurship with The Silver Room, and more.

After an experience with Chicago Mobile Makers, a partner who encourages Chicago youth to become advocates and changemakers through design-focused skill-building workshops, one Chicago Tech Academy student said:

“I enjoyed learning new things and creating my own ideas. The journey helped me change my motivation, my habits and methods.”

11,206+
individual student experiences
4,350 hours of coaching support

20 schools
We know young people do best when they choose their own paths. That’s why our postsecondary support model supports students’ voices so they can create a success path that aligns with their passions, identities, and goals.

Our postsecondary success team served over 700 seniors this school year through curriculum, mentoring, community building, and career connections. We created new experiences like the Embarc Game of Life workshop where students faced real-life postgrad scenarios, practiced decision making, and tested their financial literacy. This workshop opened students’ eyes to real-world scenarios – and helped them understand how they can lean on Embarc for support in the future. By bringing an element of play in the experience, students can better approach learning with a sense of curiosity and joy.

We couldn’t be prouder of the class of 2022 for achieving a 95% graduation rate. We also want to give a special shout-out to Elise Plaza and Marcell Norman from Bowen High School. Elise received a Wings Scholarship with a full ride to Loyola University. Marcell won a Posse Scholarship and will attend DePauw University.

The experiences Embarc students have throughout their four years build their understandings of their identities and the limitless possibilities before them. And as seniors design their postsecondary journeys, they create joy in their paths to the future.

“Going out together and going on experiences has really offered an opportunity for everyone to see themselves in a different way.”

- Dawn Ramos, Principal
Shifting to a healing perspective

At Chicago Tech Academy, an Embarc Whole School, lead teachers used student voice to devise a new activism-focused experience. Activist Bianca Jones and filmmaker Cai Thomas ran workshops on youth activism through a screening of their documentary *Change the Name*. After viewing the documentary, students worked in groups to create campaigns for an issue they felt personally connected to. One teacher praised the experience, saying:

“When we give students the space to bring in ideas, they step up as leaders.”

By centering joy, our coaching team and educators helped shift to a healing perspective that creates fertile grounds for youth learning and lays the foundation for systemic change across all schools.

Embarc led 4,350 hours of professional development workshops and coaching, including ways teachers can create Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs). Revolutionary new research from Johns Hopkins reveals that PCEs - things like expressing your feelings, feeling a sense of belonging in school, having adults take a genuine interest in you - positively influence young people’s physical and mental health even in the face of existing trauma. We know that many young people experience their most powerful PCEs during the school day. Through Embarc, we can build schools that help students heal from trauma and enhance their well-being.

Building on this professional development, teachers created new experiences to cultivate joy and integrate PCEs. At Simeon High School, juniors in Ms. Abraham’s class created a school-wide event that introduced their peers to new forms of self-care.

They had everything from guided meditation to a smoothie station, mini poetry workshops, zine-making, and a space for students to share their honest feelings about how school impacts their mental health.

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“Joy is an act of resistance”

Toi Derricotte
To better understand our community and Embarc’s impact, our data team launched a brand-new data-collection tool this year: the Elevate Survey.

The Elevate Survey measures both student and adult mindset in the categories of growth mindset, agency, sense of belonging, relationships, and exposure. Designed with feedback from the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, the Elevate Survey is a unique tool for measuring how Embarc’s model impacts the entire school community. The best kind of learning is reciprocal – students learn from teachers just as teachers learn from their students. With the Elevate Survey, we can see that happening in action.

This year, we distributed our first two rounds of the Elevate Survey to garner our community’s baseline results. As we continue to distribute the survey, we’ll gain more insight into dosage and transformations in student and adult mindset from Embarc’s model.
94% of teachers agree that Embarc is a positive addition to school culture.

95% of teachers agree that Embarc experiences are valuable for their students.

94% of graduates agree that because of Embarc, they understand and believe that anything is possible.

“I’ve enjoyed being an Embarc Experience Partner because it’s a learning experience for me, too. The students help me see my work through fresh eyes, and I always leave with an expanded perspective.

Embarc’s impact is important because giving teens access to a variety of experiences opens up their perception of what’s possible for them.”

- Taylor Morrison, Inner Workout
The joy of community was palpable all year. One of our Development Team’s priorities was to bring our community back together in both new and familiar ways.

After two years of virtual events, Embarc hosted our annual Variety Spectacular on May 19 – in person! The whole Embarc fam gathered at The Geraghty for a night of music, fun, dancing, and connecting with Embarc community members. With help from host Bravemonk, performers Sam Thousand and Meagan McNeal, plus the Boka food and Breakthru drinks, we raised more than a quarter of a million dollars to support Embarc students. We’re so grateful for everyone who made it a night to remember!

We also launched a new community of Embarc donors: the Changemakers Circle. Embarc Changemakers are donors who give $1,000+ in a year. We’ve been thrilled to gather with Changemakers throughout the year and look forward to building this community even stronger.

97% of students agree that Embarc helped them know that it is okay to ask for and seek out help when they need it.
$4,170,131
Total Revenue
*Based on unaudited financials.

$3,258,141
Total Expenses
*Based on unaudited financials.

- Individual $519,478
- Corporate $955,798
- Foundation $1,714,000
- Government $242,626
- Other $738,229

- Program Services $2,544,340
- Administrative $206,930
- Fundraising $506,871
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Danny Wechsler  Warner Media
Derrick Westbrook  Juice Chicago & Derrick C. Westbrook LLC

Embarc Staff

Imran Khan  CEO, Co-Founder
January Miller  Director of Special Projects Co-Founder
Amanda Long  Chief Program Officer
Rob Pick  Chief Financial Officer
Victoria Shire  Chief Operating Officer
Stephanie Truax  Chief Development Officer
Amy Besida  Director of Learning
Nathan Biggs  Director of Development Operations
Samantha Brenner  Postsecondary Coach
Sarah Dufour  Program Manager
Carinna Durrett  Experiential Education Coach
Mary Emmanuel  Director of Finance
Thomas Goodwin  Director of Data and Analytics
Rachael Green  Head of Experiential Education Coaching
Alegra Gutierrez  Program Manager
Shila Hafeez  Program Manager
Sarah Hoozemstra  Development Manager
Mari Hernandez  Experiential Education Coach

Laura Kroncke  Experiential Education Coach
Ellen Lau  Director of Experience Design and Partner Relationships
Alma Yarilis Lopez  Director of People
Chastinee McNeil  Postsecondary Success Coach
Frank Miller  Lead Postsecondary Success Coach
Tyesha Moores  Program Manager
Sandra Ortiz-Ortega  Senior Program Manager
Natalie Roman  Postsecondary Assistant
Latvia Samone  Program Manager

Joe Schupbach  Experiential Education Coach
Holland Spencer  Donor Communications Manager
Larissa Trock  Director of Philanthropy
Desaree Vasquez  Alumni Relations Lead & Supplies Manager
Brandy Ward  Development Assistant
Schools

What started at Harper High as a classroom program, served 20 schools across Chicago and engaged nearly 4,000 students during the 2021-22 school year. Embarc is grateful for its close partnership with Chicago Public Schools and our programming at the schools below:

- Bowen High School
- Chicago Academy High School
- Chicago Tech Academy High School
- Bogan High School
- College Prep
- George Westinghouse College Prep
- Manley Career Academy High School
- Michele Clark Academic Prep
- Orr Academy High School
- Pew C. Julian High School
- Phillips Academy High School
- Simpson Career Academy High School
- Simpson Academy for Young Women
- Sullivan High School
- Tilden High School
- Uplift Community STEAM High School

Donors

Embarc gratefully recognizes our supporters, who provided critical funds to our organization, schools, teachers, and young people between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022.

$96+:

- IMC Chicago Charitable Foundation

-$500,000 - $999,999:
- Litowitz Family Foundation
- Chicago Blackhawks

-$100,000 - $499,999:
- Blackhawk Charities
- Chicago Bulls
- Chicago White Sox

-$50,000 - $99,999:
- Chicago Bears
- Chicago Fire
- Chicago Sky

-$10,000 - $24,999:
- Chicago Bears
- Chicago Fire
- Chicago Sky

-$1,000 - $4,999:
- Chicago Bulls
- Chicago Fire
- Chicago Sky

-$500 - $999:
- Chicago Blackhawks
- Chicago Bears
- Chicago Fire

-$50 - $99:
- Chicago Blackhawks
- Chicago Bears
- Chicago Fire

-$10 - $49:
- Chicago Blackhawks
- Chicago Bears
- Chicago Fire

-$1 - $9:
- Chicago Blackhawks
- Chicago Bears
- Chicago Fire

The Jerath Family Foundation
- Vicki + Bruce Heyman

The Reva & David Logan Family Foundation
- Francis and Benjamin Logan Foundation

The Neuberger Berman Foundation
- Eloise + Rob Pick

The Windows Scholarship
- Ariel Investments
- Bain & Company

The Wintrust Foundation
- July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022.

The Osa Foundation
- Hollister Confidence Project

The Neuberger Berman Foundation
- The Jerath Family Foundation
- Vicki + Bruce Heyman

The Breakthrough Beverage Illinois
- LeoBurnett

The Soldiers’ Home Fund
- Frances and Benjamin Logan Foundation

The Freedom from Hunger Fund
- Feeding America

The Breakthrough Beverage Illinois
- LeoBurnett

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The Breakthrough Beverage Illinois
- LeoBurnett

The Freedom from Hunger Fund
- Feeding America
“Embarc enlightens students of their true possibility. Embarc’s programs offer them the invitation to dream. And it backs this up with the necessary tools and resources to turn those dreams into reality.”

- Lynn Jerath, Embarc Board Chair
Draw a time when you felt joy.

Draw your joy.
How can we work together to make sure all young people can access joyous experiences directly in their school?

Write your joy.
How can we work together to make sure all young people can access joyous experiences directly in their school?

Write your joy.