Annual Report

EYE TO EYE

Unlocking Greatness in the 1 in 5 who Learn Differently

2020
TO OUR EYE TO EYE COMMUNITY

This year was filled with highs and lows unlike any other year. Before the pandemic began, Eye to Eye was running its classic mentoring program and preparing to launch new program extensions as part of our Amplify and Innovate campaign goal to reach 25% of all middle school students with an identified learning difference by 2024. Just like each of you, we could not have imagined the way our year was about to drastically change come March. The pandemic threw us into urgent action to plan, design, and implement new versions of our programming for the remainder of the year.

Yet we came together as a community and made it happen, despite the uncertainties, anxieties, and fears that we each felt throughout those first few months. We knew we had a job to do - the one you have entrusted us with - to make sure students who learn differently understand their unique learning style, gain greater comfort in their learning difference, and advocate for what they need. We accelerated our previously developed ideas and emerged with a new plan that is grounded in research and adaptable enough to meet the emerging needs of our students today.

Reading through this annual report, you will see what we have created together. Thank you for supporting our mission to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of students who learn differently. Each day, with your support, we are moving toward educational equity and a better world for students who learn differently.

For the good together,

David Flink
Founder, Chief Empowerment Officer

Marcus Soutra
President
Innovative Technology
Keystone Mentoring
Program Revamp

UNDERSTANDING THE NATIONAL PROBLEM
In the United States, 1 in 5 students learn differently. This includes those with ADHD, specific learning disabilities like dyslexia, and other challenges related to learning.

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UNDERSTANDING THE OPPORTUNITY
Educators often struggle with a lack of resources, training, and support to adequately meet the needs of students who learn differently, while unknowingly perpetuating harmful attitudes, misconceptions, beliefs, and practices.

Despite having average to above average intelligence, without proper support students who learn differently perform well below their peers in core academic proficiency, resulting in lower retention, increased disciplinary action, and eventual drop-out.

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The focus on academic remediation and specialized support outside of the classroom setting for these students often limits opportunities to practice and develop social and emotional skills that research shows are critical for students who learn differently.

When learning differences are combined with other marginalized or underserved characteristics—like race and socioeconomics—the failure to meet the unique needs of these students is compounded, creating a negative impact that can last a lifetime.

THE SOLUTION
Eye to Eye is dedicated to improving the educational experience and outcomes of students who learn differently. We support students and educators, with a specific focus on building social and emotional skills, ensuring students can access and utilize effective accommodations, and creating supportive academic environments.

We see the impact of our programs reflected in:
- Middle school students who understand and embrace their unique way of learning and gain confidence with tools to advocate for what they need to be successful
- High school and college students who have the skills in leadership, organization, and advocacy to create a more equitable educational system for all
- Middle school educators who have the knowledge, tools, and empathy to support students who learn differently and provide them with what they need to be successful in the classroom
WHY WE NEED TO REACH MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO LEARN DIFFERENTLY

- Middle school is a time of academic, social, and developmental transition— a key time to develop the critical social and emotional skills needed to succeed in school and beyond.
- There are more than 800,000 middle school students who learn differently and receive educational accommodations. Many of these students are often left out of the planning processes for these accommodations, leaving them disengaged.
- Only 17% of teachers in a recent NCLD survey feel prepared to teach students with mild to moderate learning differences.

WHEN WE FAIL TO REACH THESE STUDENTS:

1 in 3 are held back a grade at least once.

They suffer from higher rates of anxiety & depression.

2X They are suspended twice as often as their peers.

EYE TO EYE’S MIDDLE SCHOOL IMPACT

Korey is a resilient 7th grader whose enthusiasm is matched only by his creativity. When his school switched to online learning last spring, he was prepared to adapt to the change in stride. However, just a short time ago school was quite different for him.

Korey has ADHD and dyslexia. Before his learning differences were identified, school was difficult and frustrating for him. He didn’t always understand how lessons were explained. When it was time for him to complete his homework, he often felt emotional, disorganized, and insecure.

Korey met Ethan, a mentor in the Eye to Eye art room who learns just like him, and they instantly connected. “He was nice and funny and kind to me. He made me feel happy and included,” Korey says. They shared great conversations and worked through projects together to uncover Korey’s strengths, like resilience and self-confidence.

Although Ethan graduated this year, Korey says they plan on keeping in touch and remaining buds. Asked about how he’s doing as he approaches the new school year learning remotely, he says, “I do feel more organized learning from home with my own desk but I miss seeing other kids and teachers.” He’s looking forward to returning to the art room in-person, but in the meantime has been enjoying connecting with our community through our virtual programming.

100% of Eye to Eye middle school students reported improved social and emotional skills, most notably self-management, social skills, and academic self-efficacy.
High school and college students who have the lived experience of learning differently are uniquely positioned to identify issues, policies, and practices that matter to them as they transition to adulthood.

However, without supportive environments, effective accommodations, and social and emotional skills, these students often:

• struggle with the perception that they aren’t smart despite having average to above average intelligence
• lack confidence
• are overlooked for leadership opportunities
• are not given a chance to explore their extraordinary talents

WHEN WE FAIL TO REACH THESE STUDENTS:

They are three times more likely than their peers to drop out of high school.

They enroll in college at only half the rate of their peers.

76% of college students say they didn’t tell their college they have a learning difference, leaving them without the accommodations they are entitled to.

Sophie is a senior in college whose learning difference is ADHD. She is proud to lead Chapman University’s mentoring chapter of Eye to Eye after mentoring middle school students from the Orange County community for the past two years.

Sophie shared that when COVID-19 required all of her classes to move online, she found that the community she became a part of through Eye to Eye continued to be an amazing support. “I was having a really hard time focusing on taking classes at home in a new environment with new distractions,” she admits. “However, my Eye to Eye friends were very supportive and totally understood where I was coming from.”

Her time as a mentor and chapter leader with Eye to Eye has changed the way she views education and her college experience overall. “I grew up being taught in a very one-track way and if you didn’t learn that way you really didn’t learn at all,” she said. “However, I do think it’s possible to alter this mindset.” She is excited to be a part of exploring what is possible in this new normal where different learning opportunities are more readily available. “People are looking for new and advanced ways to learn and that’s what makes right now the perfect time for students with learning differences to get what they deserve which is an equal playing field.”

HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE IMPACT

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90% of Eye to Eye high school & college students feel motivated to increase awareness of learning differences on their campus.

100% of high school & college students experience improved academic self-efficacy, motivation, and confidence in their ability to attain academic success.
In mid-March, COVID-19 caused widespread shutdowns in schools across the country, including our mentoring chapters. We quickly pivoted and created virtual art rooms to replace the in-person mentoring program. The virtual art room focused on the remaining program objectives including ideal learning environments, allies, grit, self-advocacy, empathy, goal setting, and year-end celebrations.

Graduating Differently
Our graduating students didn’t have the opportunity to attend the graduation ceremonies that they had long been anticipating, so we sent them off with our own virtual graduation ceremony. One of our graduating high school seniors kicked off the festivities with a stirring musical performance. Words of congratulations and encouragement poured in from Eye to Eye Alumn’Eye, WNBA star Jewell Loyd, James Harris from CBS News, and “How to ADHD’s” Jessica McCabe. The event concluded with heartfelt addresses delivered by Dave and Marcus.

Hill Day
Eye to Eye’s mentors participated in a Virtual Hill Day in partnership with the National Center for Learning Disabilities. Students advocated for the CARES Act, against IDEA waivers, and ensured the needs of students who learn differently were not lost in the shift to remote learning. The focus of this event was to ensure the lived experience of students with learning differences is at the forefront of decisions made on their behalf. Five members of Congress attended either live or via video message to reinforce their support for IDEA, including: Senator Maggie Hassan (NH); Senator Bob Casey (PA); Rep. Bobby Scott (VA); Congressman Glenn GT Thompson (PA); Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici (OR); Senator Chris Murphy (CT).
To adapt to the rapidly moving environment around us, Eye to Eye provided a series of virtual engagements and resources to keep our community connected. These included:

- **COVID-19 Resources:** We offered our students, parents, and educators support through learning difference-focused resources and created a COVID-19 specific resource page on our website.

- **Learn Different Labs:** We put together a 3-week long series called Learn Different Labs, a free resource offered for any educator that also included a student workshop portion.

- **Bringing Eye to Eye to Your School Webinar:** This spring and summer, we offered a webinar that provided an overview of our programming and how educators could bring our mentoring program to their school.

- **Coffee with David and Marcus:** David and Marcus missed connecting with our community at different events across the country, so they hosted a virtual coffee date where viewers could send them questions and thoughts in real-time.

- **Partners Convening:** Our annual Partners Convening was held virtually this summer. We discussed our plan for the year ahead and gathered invaluable feedback from our closest partners in the field.

**NEW PROGRAM OFFERINGS:**

To respond to the emerging needs of students and educators in a virtual world, Eye to Eye launched a series of virtual engagements this fall. These events are open to the public and delivered free of charge for both students and educators, tailored to their specific needs. The goals are to increase awareness and empathy for students with learning differences, experience empowering dialogue and interconnectedness, and identify actionable success strategies with increased self-efficacy.

**Learning Differently 101 for Students** will empower students to understand, normalize, and leverage their learning differences. Courses are offered for 90-minutes (accessible anytime), plus a 60-minute live follow up session via Zoom, and ongoing resources, tips, and inspiration via email.

**Learning Differently 101 for Educators** will provide introductory knowledge and tools for educators to better support students who learn differently. Courses are offered for 90-minutes in live workshops via Zoom, plus a 60-minute follow up session via Zoom, and ongoing resources, tips, and inspiration via email.
MENTORING REIMAGINED

Eye to Eye modified its mentoring schedule, curriculum, and training to respond to the changing educational landscape.

**Modified Schedule & Curriculum:**
We’re offering a modified 10-week version of our program starting second semester to be responsive for those school partners who are ready and interested. Curriculum and facilitation is being modified to feature projects and activities that allow for more social distancing and that meet school partner policies and procedures. Training began in October and will continue through November this year.

**Virtual Training & Events:**
School advisor, student leader, and mentor trainings are taking place entirely virtually this fall via Zoom and a new on-line platform called Thinkific. The Young Leaders Organizing Institute will take place virtually on Martin Luther King Jr. Day weekend. This three-day event will feature a host of speakers, panels, workshops, and activities, culminating in a day of service and solidarity on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Within this virtual context, we are capitalizing on the opportunity to reach a broader audience. All student leaders, mentors, Alumn’Eye, and even outside high school and college students affiliated with other partner organizations are invited to participate.

**Educator Training:**
Eye to Eye will launch an in-person **educator training program** in the spring. The program will equip and inspire middle-school educators with the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to effectively teach students who learn differently within the current education system through structured student-centered training and professional development opportunities.

**Technology Innovations:**
Building on the success of the Eye to Eye Empower app, we’re expanding our technology offerings by combining our curriculum, our lived experience, and 20+ years of working with students to create **technology solutions** that allow us to reach more students virtually. This fall, Eye to Eye will complete the first phase of the design process of these new technology innovations.

**Student-Led Clubs:**
In 2020, Eye to Eye completed the initial build of the new student-led club model, intended to serve as an alternative offering for high school and college students who are unable to access Eye to Eye’s traditional mentoring model. The **LD Alliance** is a distinct sub-brand presented as “Powered by Eye to Eye” in partnership with Understood & the National Center for Learning Disabilities. The public launch of The LD Alliance will be in the spring of 2021.
EDUCATOR SPOTLIGHT

Bari Levin has been leveling the playing field for different learners in her classroom for 33 years. As an Eye to Eye advisor working with Golf Middle School and Northwestern University, she has brought middle schoolers and college students with similar learning differences together in the Eye to Eye art room for more than 13 years. Bari is a champion in our community and is constantly searching for additional ways to support her students who learn differently.

Watching middle schoolers shift from hesitation to confidence and advocating for support surrounding their learning differences has been a highlight for Bari throughout her time as an advisor. She shares, “Having the kids be able to feel confident in who they are, embracing their learning difference, hearing other people’s stories - I think that’s been the key thing that I’ve learned through Eye to Eye - the importance of having those stories shared.”

As middle schoolers discover their confidence and learn to self-advocate for their needs in the classroom, Bari speaks up constantly for the broad community of different learners whenever she can by organizing her community, emailing like-minded partners, communicating with parents, and tweeting at celebrities to encourage their involvement. Bringing power and visibility to students to learn differently is at Bari’s core, and her students and our community are extremely grateful for her dedication and involvement.

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Eye to Eye Alumn’Eye Cassidy Wald knows and lives the meaning of service to her community. Cassidy served as a mentor at Eye to Eye’s chapter at Brown University from 2013-2017. During her time as a mentor (and eventually, chapter leader), she learned the value of having a supportive community and how to speak openly about learning differently. She says, “Eye to Eye has been huge to my personal development. Having a community where I could talk openly about my LDs and feel empowered as a self-advocate, and help others to do the same, was so important on my journey.”

Cassidy took these lessons with her to Bain Consulting, where she continues to reach out to the wider community and even hosted a Lunch & Learn event with David Flink, founder and CEO of Eye to Eye. “It’s been amazing to stay in touch with Eye to Eye, and with Dave personally, over all these years, and I’ve loved bringing this community to Bain. I know that Eye to Eye will continue to play a large role in my life, and I’m excited to see where it’s going.”

She understands the importance of giving back in other ways, too, and donates to Eye to Eye as a way to ensure that other students have access to the same programming experience that she had as a chapter leader. Eye to Eye could not do this work without our amazing Alumn’Eye donors.
GET INVOLVED

BRING US TO YOUR SCHOOL
Mentoring, Educator Training, Student Clubs
Do you or someone you love attend a middle school, high school, or college? Eye to Eye’s programs are available to launch at your school! We are now accepting inquiries for the mentoring program, student-led clubs, and educator training programs.

Speaking Engagements
David Flink, Marcus Soutra, and other Eye to Eye leaders are available for speaking engagements — including conference keynotes, speaker series, commencement speeches, parent group talks, and school-wide events — either virtually or in-person.

VOLUNTEER
Do you want to volunteer with Eye to Eye as a person who learns differently, or as an ally in this movement? We are launching new virtual and in-person volunteer opportunities in 2020-21. Here are a few ideas, but contact us today for more information!
1. Share YOUR story through guest blogs and testimonials
2. Donate your media skills
3. Give time to support our program evolution
4. Support our events and our fundraising efforts

FOLLOW US & SPREAD THE WORD

DONATE
Invest in our work today to help support different learners across the country. You can make a donation using this url: eyetoeyenational.org/donate

CONTACT US!
Want to learn more about any of these opportunities? Send us an email at info@eyetoeyenational.org and a member of our team will be in touch!

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ACCOUNTABILITY: STEWARDING RESOURCES

Our promise to our students is to be here for them when they need us. Our primary financial objective is to create a sustainable model that makes good on that promise. As Eye to Eye expands to serve more students, sustainability requires diverse sources of funding and a watchful eye on expenses to ensure a high return on your investment — more students with learning differences achieving their full potential.

ACCOUNTABILITY: PROMOTING INCLUSION AND PROTECTING CHILDREN

ADVANCING OUR COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

Earlier this year, Eye to Eye began working with Promises4 and a national DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) coach to strengthen our commitment to DEI at our organization and in our programming. Promises4 partners with educational organizations to examine and refine their talent systems, structures, and behaviors to build environments where adults are able to maximize the outcomes of the students they serve, with a deep focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Eye to Eye recently put together its DEI roadmap, allowing the organization to hold itself accountable throughout this process.

ADVANCING OUR COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING OUR STUDENTS

We are proud to announce that Eye to Eye has achieved Partner in Prevention status, a designation awarded by the nonprofit Darkness to Light! This status is given to organizations that take concrete steps to protect children by training staff and volunteers to understand the issue of child sexual abuse, identify unsafe situations and practices, and react responsibly in the best interest of children. Eye to Eye’s participation in this effort is due to the generous support of the Oak Foundation.
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OUR MISSION
is to improve the educational experience and outcomes of every student with a learning disability (LD) and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

OUR VISION
is a world in which people who learn differently are fully accepted, valued, and respected - not just by society, but by themselves - and they live ready, able, and eager to apply their unique strengths to whatever they encounter in school and life.