

# the unscripted project

IMPACT REPORT FALL 2020

NAVIGATING YOUR  
WORLD THROUGH IMPROV



# Letter from the Founders

First, thank you to everyone who has been part of the Unscripted journey so far - what a year it's been!

When we decided to launch Unscripted, the world was a different place. The early days of our nonprofit have been shaped by the pandemic — today, we're continuing to figure out how to best deliver online improv, filling needs that teachers and students have in the time of virtual learning, and focusing on creating community in classrooms. Despite this period of uncertainty and adaptation, Unscripted's guiding principles have remained steadfast: we're committed to basing our curriculum and program on the research, measuring our impact and adapting as necessary, and holding ourselves and our partners to high standards to ensure students receive a high quality education, no matter the form it takes. The skills of improv, like adapting to uncertainty, actively listening to each other to work together, and being resilient in the face of adversity, are more important now than ever before.

With your support, we hired 4 Philly-based teaching artists, built a team of 10 volunteers, worked with 146 students across 6 schools in Philly, ran an Act 48 accredited professional development for 20 Philly educators, and raised nearly \$25,000 through our fall fundraiser. We're proud of what we accomplished in today's virtual world, but are excited to magnify our impact when we're able to safely work with our students in person. In 2021, we're looking forward to partnering with more Philly schools, growing our team of teaching artists, and building out revenue streams for long-term sustainability.

We truly could not have done this without your support. Thank you for believing in our mission, offering us actionable advice and honest feedback, connecting us with those whom we otherwise wouldn't be able to reach, and contributing generously to our first fundraiser.

To our partners at schools: principals, classroom teachers, and folks in the district — thank you for taking a chance on our program in our pilot semester. And to the University of Pennsylvania — thank you for investing in our team and our vision, and for helping us get Unscripted off the ground.

Here's to empowering the next generation of Philly youth through improv — we cannot wait to see where this journey takes us.



*Meera Philip*

**MEERA MENON & PHILIP CHEN**

**Our mission** is to equip students with the building blocks for personal and professional success through the power of an improv education.

**We hope to help create a world in which every child leaves school prepared to embrace challenges, to seize opportunities, and to unlock their own potential.**



## Founding Story

We're Meera and Philip. We met on the first day of college and immediately became friends, bonding over a shared passion for the performing arts. Through our theater and improv experiences growing up, we developed confidence, sharpened our communication skills, respected and worked with differing viewpoints, and became comfortable with vulnerability. As business students, we found that these very same skills have been instrumental to our success in both school and the workforce – we learned how to be articulate public speakers, how to better understand others' point of views, and how to persevere in the face of adversity. Drawing from these experiences, we created Unscripted to equip students with the building blocks for personal and professional success through improv; we aim to provide its value to everyone, particularly to those who might not otherwise have access.

Launched through the generous support of the University of Pennsylvania's [President's Engagement Prize](#), we are deeply committed to taking a methodical and interdisciplinary approach in building an innovative and impactful program for the students of Philadelphia. This all would not be possible without the support of educators, advocates, volunteers, and numerous partners — we are so excited for you to join us on our journey at The Unscripted Project.

# Growth of Unscripted

## FEBRUARY 2020

- Unscripted runs its first pilot program at SLA Center City. 100% of students surveyed said that they would participate again!

## APRIL 2020

- Meera and Philip are awarded the President's Engagement Prize from their alma mater, the University of Pennsylvania — a \$200,000 grant.

## AUGUST 2020

- Received Act 48 accreditation from the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Now, teachers can receive their continuing education credits from our professional development course on incorporating improv into the classroom.

## SEPTEMBER 2020

- Created 9-week online curriculum and hired a team of 4 incredible Philly-based teaching artists.

## OCTOBER 2020

- Workshops launched, the team ran 9-week sessions in 12 classrooms at its 6 partner schools and worked with a total of 146 students.
- Received 501(c)(3) tax exempt status from the IRS.

## DECEMBER 2020

- First Professional Development workshop for 20 Philly educators on bringing virtual improv into their classrooms.



- [Fall Virtual Celebration](#), part of our 20/2020 Fundraising Campaign, was a success — featuring performances from Penn student groups and testimonials from our students, teaching artists, and key supporters.
- Surpassed our fundraising goal of \$20,000 by the end of 2020 for the 20/2020 Campaign, raising \$24,722 from our generous network of supporters.

## JANUARY 2021

- Hired 1 more teaching artist, growing our team to 5 for the spring semester.
- Spring semester launched, working with 8 partner schools & 1 partner nonprofit, working with ~ 200 students.
- We won 1st place at the Greater Philadelphia Social Innovation Awards, in the category of "Education Entrepreneurship".

# Unscripted's Student Workshop Series

## CURRICULUM DESIGN

Our free 9-week series of improv workshops in classrooms is our signature program. The series is taught by professional teaching artists and in collaboration with classroom teachers. Our innovative curriculum has been created with the counsel of our partners at [Magnet Theater](#) in NYC and the [Philly Improv Theater](#) (PHIT). It is in alignment with PA state standards, [CASEL social-emotional learning standards](#) and both the Philadelphia School District's [Arts and Creativity Framework](#) and ["Get Ready, Leave Ready"](#) college and career readiness standards. Our virtual program is also a response to the needs of teachers and administrators to build community in their classrooms in this time of loneliness and uncertainty.

## PROGRAM GOALS

Through the 9 weeks, we provide students in a given cohort with a robust introduction to improvisation and its associated skills. Our goal is for students to have developed and honed skills such as active listening, collaborating, speaking publicly with confidence, and resiliency by the end of the program. Our improv curriculum is differentiated by its focus on life skills — each week is centered around a certain key concept outside of improv (for example, point of view and character) and all of the games are then adapted to focus on that skill.

## BEYOND OUR PROGRAM

Following the program, students are invited to apply to Unscripted's scholarship program to continue their improv practice at [Comedysportz](#), one of Philly's premier improv theaters. Through our partnership, we fully subsidize the cost of an improv course at the theater. We also facilitate open spaces each month — an opportunity for all Unscripted alum to continue to play and connect with the community.



**WEEK 1:**  
Power of play  
and humor

**WEEK 2:**  
Acceptance  
and listening

**WEEK 3:**  
Adapting to  
uncertainty

**WEEK 4:**  
Understanding  
emotions &  
nonverbal  
communication

**WEEK 5:**  
Midway review

**WEEK 6:**  
Understanding  
different POV  
through creating  
characters

**WEEK 7:**  
Building  
relationships  
and fostering  
collaboration

**WEEK 8:**  
Storytelling and  
the art of  
persuasion

**WEEK 9:**  
Wrap up

## PARTNER SCHOOLS AND ORGANIZATIONS:



Science Leadership Academy Center City (Fall 20 / Spring 21)



KIPP DuBois Collegiate Academy (Fall 20 / Spring 21)



Fels High School (Fall 20)



Robeson High School (Fall 20)



Franklin Learning Center  
(Fall 20 / Spring 21)



Northeast High School  
(Spring 21)



Radnor ABC Program  
(Spring 21)



Wagner Middle School (Fall 20 / Spring 21)



CW Henry Middle School (Spring 21)



Franklin S. Edmonds Elementary School (Spring 21)

**CLICK TO WATCH** THE FINAL SHOWCASE AT ONE OF  
UNSCRIPTED'S CLASSES AT FRANKLIN LEARNING CENTER



# Act 48 Professional Development Course

In addition to our student-facing programming, we are also empowering Philly educators to bring the power of improv to their students through our professional development (PD) programming. Our workshops have three key components:

- 1 Intro to Improv as a Pedagogical Tool:** the theory behind improvisation and how it works in the classroom
- 2 Becoming an Improviser:** participants play improv games and understand the mechanisms behind why the games work the way that they do
- 3 Direct Classroom Applications of Improv:** how to facilitate games and bring them into the classroom, including as standards-aligned lesson plans

The three parts of our program are split into two, two-hour workshops. Following the workshops, teachers receive 4 Act 48 hours (continuing education credits, due to our accreditation from the Pennsylvania Department of Education). By the end of our workshops, our goal is for educators to understand the key mechanisms behind why improv is a valuable educational tool and be able to apply it to fit the needs of their students.



We successfully ran a pilot for 20 educators on December 1st and 2nd, 2020. Here's what they had to say:

*The feeling that it was O.K. to make mistakes. The instructor talked about cheerleading for students which resonated with me. I feel like I share some of the same fear that my students must feel about risking making a mistake in front of other people. All that positive feedback made me feel more comfortable to take risks. It was the happiest and most engaging P.D. I've ever been to.*

**PD Participant, Dr. Ethel Allen school**

*The concept of "Learning Through Play". I did not know that improv is a great tool for problem-solving, building confidence and is used to help people who suffer from social anxiety.*

**PD Participant,  
Robert E. Lamberton Elementary School**

*It made me feel more at ease talking in front of my peers. I felt accepted.*

**PD Participant,  
Feltonville Intermediate**

*I learned how to play a number of games that I can teach to my students. I learned to take some risks and how much skill is involved in doing improv well. I wouldn't say I am naturally good at it but I can see how by practicing I could improve. My favorite part was just that it made us laugh so much.*

**PD Participant, Dr. Ethel Allen school**

## HEAR FROM SOME OF OUR STUDENTS



**Lenda Yan**, Franklin Learning Center

[CLICK TO WATCH](#)



**Bryant Fleming**, Franklin Learning Center

[CLICK TO WATCH](#)

## HEAR FROM OUR FALL TEACHING ARTISTS



**Tara Gadomski**, Unscripted Teaching Artist

[CLICK TO WATCH](#)



**Katherine Perry**, Unscripted Teaching Artist

[CLICK TO WATCH](#)



**Susan LaPalombara**, Unscripted Teaching Artist

[CLICK TO WATCH](#)



**Paul Deichmann**, Unscripted Teaching Artist

[CLICK TO WATCH](#)

## FALL 2020 STUDENT PROGRAMMING

**6** schools

**12** virtual classrooms

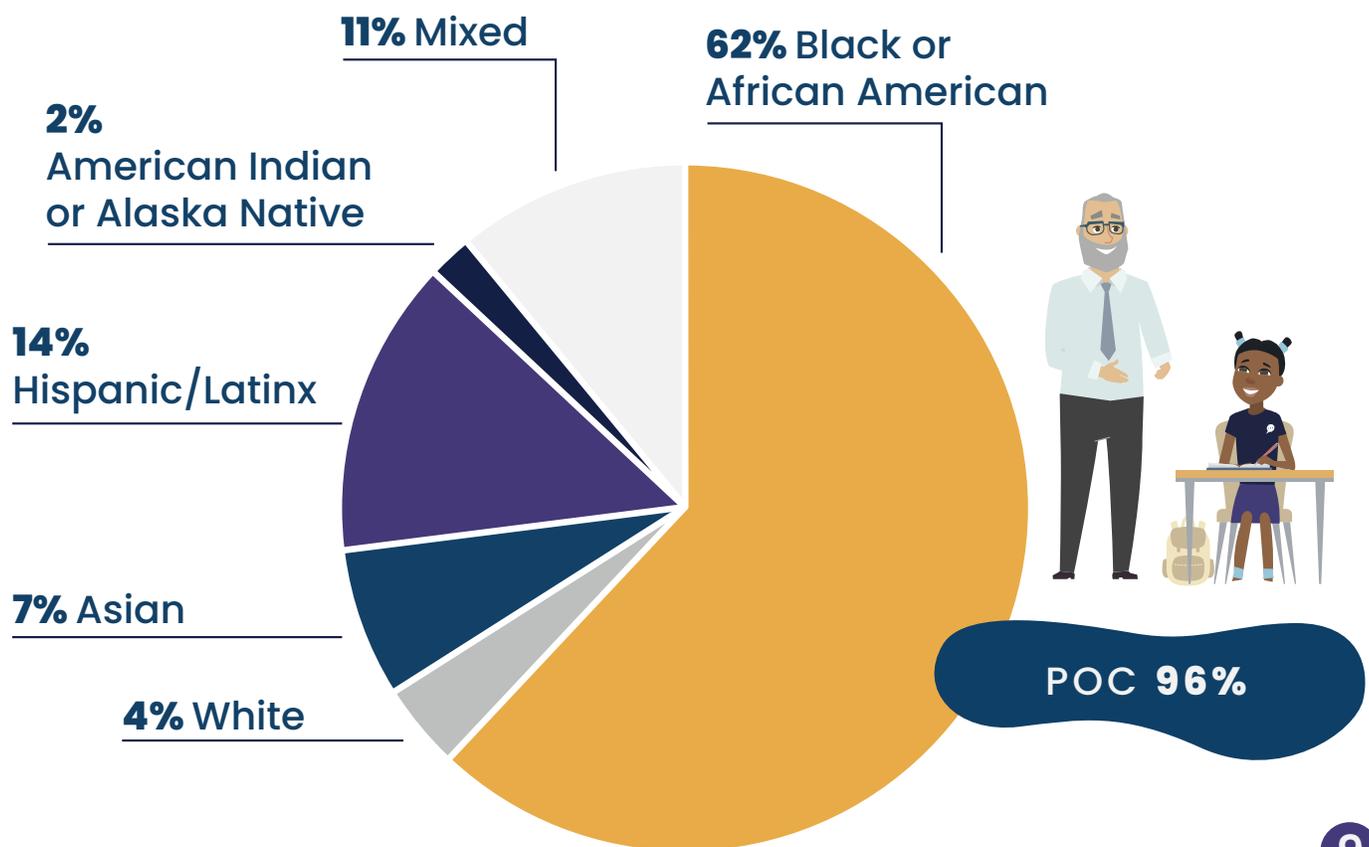
**146** students

**108 HOURS OF IMPROV EDUCATION**

### STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

At the schools we work at, the average percent of students who are classified as “economically disadvantaged” is 90%

*CEP rate obtained by the School District of Philadelphia and is based on the % of students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch*



# What We Are Measuring And Why

## Screening for SAD (Social Anxiety Disorder)<sup>1</sup>

### RESULT:

15% of students who initially screened positive for social anxiety no longer did at the end of our program.

**What is it?** Social anxiety disorder, also known as social phobia, is a mental health condition in which interactions with others can cause irrational anxiety, fear, self-consciousness, and embarrassment. It can be an indicator for more serious mental health issues in the future.

**Why do we measure it?** Because improv has been successfully used to treat<sup>2</sup> social anxiety, our hypothesis is that students may experience less social anxiety as a result of participating in our programs.

**How do we measure it?** Prior to our program, we screen all of our students for social anxiety disorder using the Mini-SPIN, a research-backed tool. We screen once again at the end of the program to determine if students who initially screened positive for SAD no longer do.

## Self Confidence

### RESULT:

88% of students state that they feel more confident in front of their peers than they did before the class.

**What is it?** "Self-confidence means you accept and trust yourself, know your strengths and weaknesses well, and have a positive view of yourself, communicate assertively, and can handle criticism."<sup>3</sup>

**Why do we measure it?** Research has shown that improvisational training is linked to higher levels of self-confidence in both medical students<sup>4</sup> and student teachers<sup>5</sup>. Our hypothesis is that this effect will apply to school-aged children as well.

**How do we measure it?** Surveys are an accepted tool for measuring attitudinal changes, so we survey students before and after the workshop series to measure changes in self-confidence.

### Community

In these lonely times, it was important for us to try to create community in the classes which we worked. We simply asked students whether they felt closer to their peers in this class as a result of this program - and 92% of them said yes.

# Social and Emotional Self-Efficacy

## RESULT:

Social self-efficacy increased in 65% of students. Emotional self-efficacy increased in 58% of students.

- What is it?** Self-efficacy is a key tenet of social emotional learning and wellness. Social self-efficacy is “an individual’s confidence in their ability to engage in the social interactional tasks necessary to initiate and maintain interpersonal relationships.” Emotional self-efficacy is “one’s belief that they can manage negative emotional states when faced with adversity... as well as believing one is capable to adequately express positive emotions during pleasant events”<sup>6</sup>
- Why do we measure it?** We measure social self-efficacy because improv facilitates collaboration and team-building in a safe, supportive environment. We measure emotional self-efficacy because in improv, we work to identify our own emotions as well as how different emotions manifest in others. Our hypothesis is that the benefits of this work may manifest in increases in social and emotional self-efficacy.
- How do we measure it?** We measure both social and emotional self-efficacy through the Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children<sup>6</sup> (SEQ-C), a survey tool we utilize before and after the workshop series to record any changes.

# Communication Skills

## RESULT:

80% of students stated they believe they are better communicators than they were prior to the program.

- What are we referring to?** We are specifically assessing students’ comfort with, and performance in, public speaking.
- Why do we measure it?** Preliminary research<sup>7</sup> suggests that improvisational training can improve public speaking skills for students in secondary school.
- How do we measure it?** We surveyed students at the end of the program asking if they believed they were better communicators than before. In the future, we hope to assess using performative measures as well.

<sup>1</sup>Social Anxiety Disorder, The Lancet

<sup>2</sup>The use of improvisational theater training to reduce social anxiety in adolescents, Arts in Psychotherapy

<sup>3</sup>What is self-confidence?, University of South Florida

<sup>4</sup>Thinking on my feet: an improvisation course to enhance students’ confidence and responsiveness in the medical interview, Education for Primary Care

<sup>5</sup>Theater Improvisation Promoting Interpersonal Confidence of Student Teachers, European Journal of Social and Behavioral Sciences

<sup>6</sup>Emotional Self-Efficacy, Brandon University

<sup>7</sup>Improving public speaking in secondary education—Exploring the potential of an improvisation training, Jordi Castelyn

## TESTIMONY FROM CLASSROOM TEACHER

Working with Unscripted has been the biggest gift we could hope for this year. In an unprecedented educational situation, with students learning virtually, Unscripted pivoted easily and brought the art of live performance, emotional expression, and community building straight to our students' screens. The experience was cathartic for our students and was easily their favorite hour of the week. Seeing the students learn new ways to be creative and express themselves has been a true joy, and so necessary during these tough times. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend Unscripted to any teacher in any school. Students were engaged, learning, and grateful for the energy that the teaching artists brought to every session. We will forever be grateful for Philip and Meera and for their ingenuity and hard work that brought this needed program to so many school children.

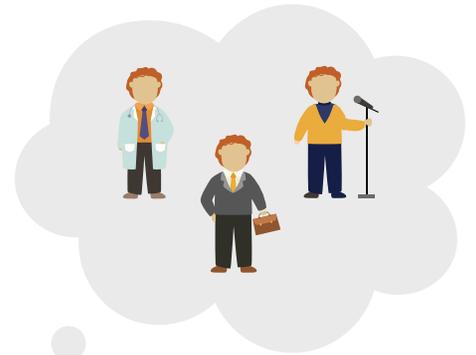
**-Michelle Frank, Franklin Learning Center**

### QUOTES FROM STUDENTS:



"Whenever I'm sad, tired or hungry, improv makes me forget it and I always leave with a smile. I feel closer to my classmates because of it because I know I can be myself and no one is going to judge me when I do something wrong."

**12th Grade Student,  
Franklin Learning Center**



"I learned how to think outside of the box and be prepared for anything thrown at me."

**9th Grade Student,  
KIPP DuBois**

"I learned to be comfortable being my unique self, to be open to new things and how to use improv skills in real life."

**11th Grade Student,  
Samuel Fels High School**

"I learned that improv is all about teamwork, and although you may not know what their next line is going to be, there are no right or wrong statements."

**11th Grade Student, Science Leadership Academy**

