



POLICE-FREE SCHOOLS THROUGH PRACTICE: GGE IN CONVERSATION WITH TEACHERS UNITE

September 16, 2020

On September 16, 2020, Girls for Gender Equity launched Volume 1 of our [Police-Free Schools Toolkit](#), *"Police-Free Schools Through Practice: A Toolkit for New York City School Communities."*

The following is a transcript of the [conversation](#) held between **Nicole Hamilton, Director of Community Partnerships at Girls for Gender Equity**, and **Sally Lee, Founder and Director of Teachers Unite**. The transcript has been edited for flow.

NICOLE: We wanted to give admin folks a kind of jump start to be able to be thinking about this new year and thinking about laying the groundwork for really making this shift. We are in a really exciting time in our country, an exciting time in this world right now where folks are planting new seeds, and pulling up weeds, and trying to figure out how to do things differently. And someone who has been talking about this, this is not a new phenomenon, Sally has been spearheading this movement for quite some time and educating and mobilizing educators. So we are really excited to have her here today. Sally, if you would like to introduce yourself to the group that would be wonderful; if you could tell us a little bit about who you are and how you came to this work.

SALLY: Sure! Well thanks so much for having me, I'm excited to talk with you too. I'm a fan of GGE, I'm a fan of the work, and congratulations on this toolkit. I was looking through it and that was work, I know it was work. So I'm really impressed and grateful to be part of the celebration of launching it. I am Sally Lee, I am the Director of Teachers Unite, New Yorker, Black multiracial woman, abolitionist, I can say all the things or we can talk about it also!

NICOLE: I am happy to continue on with a little bit of your bio. As you already said, born and raised in New York, graduate of Stuyvesant High School, Wesleyan University, Bank Street College of Education, and working in education and within educational nonprofit settings for nearly 30 years, so you have lots of experience under your belt.

And also one of the things that I think is exciting too, one of the early members of NYCoRE, which is another group that I really love too, radical educators really trying to do different things in New York City. NYCORE is the New York Coalition of Radical Educators. And Sally was a part of that org in the early 2000s, and then you founded Teachers Unite in 2006. And I love that you say that it is a strategic center for a new generation of education justice activists to reclaim their union alongside veteran teachers and communities of color. That feels very meaningful and really salient even at this time. So from 2006 to 2020, here we are.

SALLY: Here we are.

NICOLE: Here we are!

Anything else that you'd want to add just about your journey to this point before we jump in.

SALLY: Not that's coming to mind, you guide me! You help me think of what to talk about because I'll go on.

NICOLE: Sure! As we all know, there has just been so much going on in our world right now. We are in the midst of a global pandemic and also racial uprising in our country. Nothing new, but the convergence of those two things is probably a new thing for us all. And a lot of municipalities around the country have been thinking about the police and their relationship to policing and policing in schools in particular. GGE and teachers unite have been fighting for a long time and this year for a city budget, to get us closer to the vision of police-free schools. We were part of one of the largest city wide marches for police-free schools in June, together.

We at GGE have historically done a lot of organizing and advocacy work alongside school-based work, to bring in culturally responsive restorative practices that can help facilitate and sustain police-free schools. That has been a lot of our work over the years and working in direct relationship and close relationship to schools, trying

to help them to grow and develop their own restorative practice knowing that restorative practice is the foundation for sustaining police-free schools. I remember when in our early years of afterschool programming at GGE, I worked in a school and I worked very closely with one of your former staff members to come weekly and we did lunch and learns with teachers to really start to dig into restorative practice and see how they could learn small tricks and small tools to start turn-keying in their classrooms and then spread a schoolwide initiative. We did a lot of work in that school and ultimately they turned their SAFE room into a mediation room and had young people at the forefront, leading the work of mediation during lunchtime instead of detentions, and all of that was done in partnership with Teachers Unite. I personally have also been a member for a quite many years.

But today we are launching this Volume 1 of our toolkit, we just really want to have a dialogue and talk about abolition, with a long time abolitionist education group. We're going to jump right into a conversation, and I just will say that even in preparing for this conversation, looking through Teachers Unite's website and also just being really struck by some of the things that I saw there and will share with you.

One of the first things that I saw when I opened up your webpage was:

"We organize educators to stand against racism and oppression."

That is a simple yet very profound statement and so I am wondering if you can share with us how you came to start Teachers Unite and what is the genesis for this kind of statement. Why is it important to organize educators, especially in a time like this?

SALLY:

Well it's interesting because when I was looking at the toolkit that you're launching today, one of the first things I saw was I believe in the introduction, or the preface, saying that the role of schools has been to maintain hierarchy and status quo. And that idea was something I was introduced to in college, taking a course on education, reading Foucault, learning about how schools maintained the capitalist structure, and I was really possessed by that idea, really possessed by the idea of

how to disrupt that role that schools have. And I didn't know what career that was. "What job is it where you..." I wanted to be a teacher to really understand that system in a way. As you mentioned I went to Stuyvesant, which is a not-typical public high school. I went to private schools before that. I went to a private university. I had always loved working with kids, I was pretty good at it and I thought, let me be a teacher and that's the way to work within the system perhaps. I went to a progressive grad school, I worked in progressive schools as a student teacher and as a teacher, but I wasn't finding like minded educators in terms of folks who were really fired up about this idea of transformation, about this idea of how can teaching be part community organizing, what is community organizing, where does that disruption sort of come in.

As I was a teacher, I was just so obsessed with this idea of creating that network seeing how politically like minded teachers were the first to burn out because of that lack of connection with feeling like their profession could be connected to this larger systems work. I said to myself, "I'm going to start an organization." I was young. It was a little wild. I had gone through some stuff in life that had made me think, "I'm just going to do it!" And that the same time I had found out about a group of educators who were meeting to oppose, as teachers, the Iraq War. This was 2002 or so. And so I joined that group and we called ourselves New York Collective of Radical Educators. When I left teaching, I was lucky enough to have met Iris Morales, who worked at the time at the Union Square Awards and encouraged me to work there for a couple years to see what grassroots organizing was. It was there that I was introduced to the organizers in New York City, that I so admired. I learned about DRUM, I learned about FIERCE, I learned about Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, I learned about Critical Resistance New York. And I thought here are these radical activist teachers and they need a home and some capacity and learning about organizing and there were some opposition caucuses within the union, but again I saw a need for capacity building, around building power.

At that same time, I think there were teachers leaving, for example, Teach For America, folks who were disenchanting with either they didn't find a connection to

their union as a mobilizing force, and they were maybe entering teaching with idealistic ideas but not really connecting to an organization. So you started to see again in the early 2000s you know NYCoRE built but then there was also Teachers for Social Justice in California and one in Chicago, and that was sort of the beginning of when this sort of teacher activists for social justice sort of world started and networks started forming.

NICOLE: Thank you for giving us the picture and the full picture of understanding how we have come to this time. Especially because I feel New York City has so many radical educators and people who are really passionate about making a new way for young people and for schools. It also seems sometimes that we are a little behind the curve like California and Oakland and folks who are super on their game with their RJ practice and revolutionizing what discipline and what relationships to safety and discipline look like in their schools. And not that we are not always trying to push the envelope, but I feel like sometimes we are met with resistance that makes things really difficult and it's really important to organize and that educators have a space. I love that you say that they needed a home and a place to come together as like minded, because, you're right, just because you work in a school with ten other people doesn't mean that everybody is on the same page.

SALLY: At all!

NICOLE: It doesn't mean that everybody has the same mentality, is thinking the same way, so sometimes it can feel very isolating to be a radical educator in your school setting. To have a place where you come and be with other like minded people and strategize and see what's working with other settings is really really helpful. One of the reasons that we started and the thought of how this toolkit came to be was, we had been talking a lot about how do we assist or support educators and folks from within schools to be able to tell their story and to have a language. We find sometimes there are those pockets of folks who have it. They got it. They know what to say. They know exactly what to say, if they were to provide testimony they could do that. But then there are some folks that have the feeling, have the thought, but don't

always have the language and doing always have the historical concepts or the framework to understand not just that this is something I feel personally about but that this is a movement I want to be connected to and what kind of education do I need in order to be able to mobilize myself and my school community.

So thinking about the role of political education, what kind of education is necessary for teachers to be able to speak truth to power in a way that feels connected to their work on the ground and also connected to the larger movement? Something else that I found on your website that really struck me, I was just having a field day on the Teachers Unite website, I highly recommend you all to take a look and getting connected to them as an organization as well if you are an educator. You say on the website:

“We see structural racism and capitalism as the core of the problems in public education. We recognize restorative justice as a historical tradition of resistance developed by communities of color – from undocumented immigrants to First Nations. We chose to use restorative justice to honor this tradition and build from this long-standing history.”

So as we talk about RJ and restorative practices and restorative justice, can you help us to understand a bit how you connect restorative practice and the work that you’ve been doing all these years to police-free schools and what it means, how the two things are in tandem and work together?

SALLY:

School-to-prison pipeline and police-free schools and other terms that are our shorthand to sort of define the problems and solutions I feel like, as you mentioned, have been worked on for years, for twenty years. In the earlier 2000s, actually when I was still in NYCORE, myself and Danielle Jerome started a study group called *Rethinking Discipline*. NYCORE still has inquiry to action groups to this day and I believe, I could be wrong, that the Rethinking Discipline is the longest lasting – I facilitated that one year, maybe two years – I believe it is still going. It was right at that time that these terms like school-to-prison pipeline were coming into the

activist center. In New York, activists were looking at the impact program that put the metal detectors in schools, this was sort of post-Columbine.

When I started Teachers Unite we had built relationships through that study group and through that work with NYCLU, with NESRI, which is now called Partners for Dignity and Rights, and our earliest work in Teachers Unite was working with partners like that in trying to figure out what's the teacher role in resisting this policing trend. There's a real hunger among that advocacy world for educator allies who are working within the system, and so our members who were those allies were really trying to figure out well how do we operate as gatekeepers to what is often called the school-to-prison pipeline. What's our work in our school to undermine it? And really took it upon themselves to study what restorative justice was, it's history, what practices, how they could adapt practices to their schools, but not only that, just not only in their classroom but how they could introduce or develop or better celebrate core values in their schools that are really the fundamental core to bringing the school community together. And so our first organizer, I think when you mentioned one of our earlier organizers that you worked with I think you're talking about Anna?

NICOLE: Yes!

SALLY: Shout out to Anna Bean.

NICOLE: Mmmhmm!

SALLY: And before the wonderful Anna Bean, we had the wonderful Nathalie Havlin who really had done this sort of disrupting policing work as a union organizer within a higher ed location in Illinois, and so really brought to us also a way of thinking about organizing itself as transformative justice. We talk sometimes in our circles, we're not just trying to restore or maintain what schools have already been if they've been places of punishment or pushout and maintaining the status quo, we are trying to uproot that injustice, we're trying to transform that paradigm. We started to look at what are the principles of transformative justice, collective leadership, respect for all

voices, just how repairing harm of course, and collective accountability, and how that really is the same, not just in how to resolve a conflict, but also the very principles of how our members wanted to organize in their schools. They wanted to organize with parents, and paras, and other staff, and their students first and foremost, particularly when working in high schools. We rooted our organizing theory in social change and transformative justice principles as we understood them and as we studied them.

NICOLE: I think that that mirrors how we approach this toolkit in that this is not a top-down thing. This is not just something principals need to know, “Oh I’m going to create a police-free school in isolation by myself, without the rest of my school community.” Literally, every member of the school community has a role to play and it is an initiative that requires everyone. Long and gone are the days when “oh I can opt-out of that, or I don’t have to be a part of that professional development opportunity, or I don’t need to learn the benefits of keeping circle in my space.” Understanding that the practices and the values are the foundation of my school. Everything should point back to those things.

We do spend some time in the toolkit in this section too, helping entire school communities think through what are your actual core values. And at this point, you might need to revisit them and rethink them and rewrite them together, and start from the beginning from the ground up to create something that people can buy into. And then also thinking, how do these values move us forward toward sustaining police-free schools. How are they rooted in restorative practice, how are they culturally responsive, how are they healing centered? How are they all of these things? Because the first right of refusal for police-free schools is always like, “Oh we just need to figure out how to not have violence.” But actually, we need to figure out how to build community.

SALLY: Right.

NICOLE: And how to reclaim the power of accountability for our own communities, to say “We can deal with our things ourselves because we care for each other.” And building a

community of accountability and care and trust and respect and all those things. As I learned from the great Anna Bean, that structural part of the Tier I portion of the triangle of restorative practice is where you spend most of your time and where you spend most of your energy so you don't have to get up to Tier II and Tier III, hopefully very rarely if ever. Even those shifts are huge shifts for schools because that is not how they operate regularly.

SALLY: Although we are lucky, I was thinking before when you mentioned that sometimes it seems like they're ahead in other places, like in California, and something that just comes back to me, again and again, is just how big we are here. Our school system is just so large compared to other districts, even to LA, even to Chicago and there is amazing diversity among our school communities. There are school communities that were founded knowing those tiers, they might not even call them those three tiers of restorative practices, but really with a deep commitment to those sort of transformative communities. So we are lucky that there are those schools that are building those models because the City's solution to restorative justice has so often, as you've said like in talking about top-down, has been "yup we're doing restorative justice now so now we meet with principals and now they meet with two key staff people and duh duh duh duh."

We at Teachers Unite actually really struggled for a few years because we got this reputation, not a bad reputation of course, but as like the RJ teacher group, but as I'm discussing with you, that's not our genesis. That's not the history of Teachers Unite. I certainly didn't come from speaking about restorative justice or being trained in it. But the model in our school system, particularly in New York, is such one of private contracts, and how do we just like systematize everything top-down. Our members made a decision many years ago we said we're not going to get a vendor number, which is what you need in order to business with the DOE because we knew our members were doing peer to peer radical professional development and we knew that if there was going to be an opportunity suddenly to make thousands, millions with the department of ed, that that would be all that we do. And our members said no, we're organizers. We're not service providers. So just speaking to

what you're lifting up in terms of the model of how our members believe transformation of any kind has to happen.

NICOLE: That's really deep. And I'm also wondering and thinking too about that intersection to where service providers also become organizers and how change needs to happen, and sometimes you have to be the mole, "how can I actually do some things in here, dismantling the master's house." It's a humongous system as you've said with a lot of different moving points. Some of the things that we've been seeing in our advocacy work is that systems this large do not always have uniform approaches to roll out. So there is a lot of inequity with things, like which schools do have metal detectors, which schools do have strong restorative practices. Sometimes it's kind of like we are left to, I don't know how to say it, but if you happen to be in a school with a great principal who is really radical and forward-thinking and progressive and has a really great diversity equity and inclusion lens, then you might be lucky or well off. And then if you're not, you're not.

So how do we equip folks to make change where they are, and hopefully in each of these volumes that we continue to release that'll be for each individual stakeholder where they are. So as administrators, how are you thinking about your budget, and how does your budget reflect your values and how do your values reflect your commitment to sustaining a police-free school. How does your professional development and the things that you choose to expose your staff to and how you develop your staff reflect your commitment to police-free schools? Every aspect, how do we create values that are based around the belief that we do not need the police in our schools and that we can be accountable to our own school communities and we can heal and build wonderful things without the presence of police, and how does that north star guide budgeting, and professional development, and outreach to families, and every other thing. We are also realizing that the political education piece is super important in bridging that gap.

As you shared with us yesterday, these kinds of questions, the top five questions that people ask. But what if I like my safety agent? Or as an administrator, well I'm just

doing my best to not engage the police in my school, even if you're in a co-located school with five other schools, you may be the principal that's not engaging the cops, but the other four principals may not have the same thought as you. Can you talk a little bit more about the importance of political education and understanding the genesis of all of this, and like, the police. You talked a lot about contracts and how these things work. If you could say what things you think educators need to know in order to really engage in this movement.

SALLY:

That's a great question. I was thinking that the importance of it was that we need to be getting on the same page and grounding ourselves. New York is so big. There are all these different groupings and groups of activists and ways that teachers might be active. I might be in a political party, I might be in a caucus, I might be in an organization like Teachers Unite or NYCoRE. And I think the need for cross-cutting study, and we see that, I know that's how the progressive left caucuses in other cities were also started, was through study groups. And there's a lot to study. There's labor history. There's certainly abolitionist history and understanding the expansion of the carceral state. What that looks like. But there is also the study that needs to happen with the organizations and organizers that have been engaged with this already so that educators aren't in isolation. Feeling like I am the political savior trajectory that some are encouraged to feel. There is this hero idea of an educator that is a bit individualistic.

I think there's understanding economic systems. How race and racism work. Understanding the carceral state. One thing that we developed, and I don't know if this fits exactly in your question but I was thinking of it when you were talking before when I was looking at the toolkit, I was thinking what a perfect companion piece for what we produced a few years ago with Center for Urban Pedagogy, "Schools Are Us." This was a little toolkit that I just love that was about School Leadership Teams and how they're tasked with setting the goals for the school and they are technically what holds the principal accountable for setting their budget. So exactly what you were talking about and what's in your toolkit about that sort of values checklist and there were pieces in there where I thought I could see a School Leadership Team

doing that. And really as they set their comprehensive education plan, which is mandated by the state, like it is a real mechanism with some legal teeth. So this is an example of some of the smaller education system political education that we've done with our members and with parents really and with students to say this is really the breakdown. Public schools are a public institution and we are supposed to control them, they are supposed to be a democracy and they are supposed to be community participation. And we are one of the only districts in the country that doesn't have a democratic system, we have mayoral control. And so doing education just around that, and just how explicitly Mayoral control embodies what we define as institutional racism and yet every year it just goes unchallenged and every mayoral election just goes unchallenged, it's bizarre. I feel that is something we really need to look at and look at the history of, including Ocean-Hill Brownsville and how the community school boards came to be and all of that. I think in really understanding, well what is our potential power when it comes to schools in our city.

NICOLE: I'm feeling a series of educational chats.

SALLY: Let's do it!

NICOLE: If you could have the ear of every administrator in New York City at this particular moment, at the convergence of COVID-19, of racial unrest in our country, and a nationwide movement to defund the police, what would you want them to hear? What have you grappled with, what is unique in this moment, and what do we need?

SALLY: And when you say administrators you're thinking of principals?

NICOLE: Yeah, principals, assistant principals, folks who are gatekeeper decision-makers of their schools.

SALLY: It's hard. I don't normally think of them as an audience, particularly because I have the good fortune to have this positively warped idea of who teachers are, who principals are, as these folks that will get handcuffs on themselves before they let a

cop arrest their student. Really going back to what we were just talking about, for example, I'm a big promoter of school leadership teams, which is why we made our tool, and it's difficult because just like so much imperfect mechanisms in our democracy, I talk a lot about how I think parents should take over their parent associations and students should really takeover their student councils and really use them to organize and build power. I think principals they are supposed to be held accountable by their staff, who have unions and the parents, and to some extent their students, and if they're not operating their school leadership teams properly, because they often become these puppet shows I guess, and they're not very democratic, and so it's just a way for folks to come and then the principal says this is what we're going to do, this is how we're going to do it, this is how we're paying for it, and folks say like yeah okay. Because who has the time and who has the bandwidth and who has the whatever, and so I can't imagine speaking to principals as much as talking to the rest of us.

NICOLE: Be expansive in your response! Talk to us all, for sure!

SALLY: We need to figure out ways to force the city to really invest in our grassroots leadership and the grassroots leadership of school communities. I say it all over the place, we need to end Mayoral Control and we need to as much as possible then transform our system so that we have self-determination and community control and folks need to pull the levers. As my friend, Lisa Donlin often says, those levers of democracy that we need to be able to pull, and our members, Teachers Unite members, have some of those levers in their union even if they're disenchanted with their union leaders, there's some voting, there's some power, but we've lost that as parents and as students I think in our school system. We need to take that power back.

NICOLE: That's great. Take your power back. And micro/macro. Take your power back within your school communities as each group of stakeholders having the power to organize and to have their needs be met, and also on a macro level, taking our power as school communities, back from the police and the NYPD to be able to heal

our own communities, to be able to be and thrive without them, just taking our power back.

SALLY: I love that part of the toolkit from what I saw, was how are we going to intervene in these police structures, and also the grounding to get to that point. That idea that in school communities that school leadership teams for example could be first grappling with these concepts of how do we feel about policing, how do we feel about this current moment, how do we feel about our students' exposure to the carceral state, and to police, and then an actual checklist to help them go through some real processes that could be part of their real meeting agendas, that would be so amazing.

NICOLE: We were really just trying to think of like what is the paper that you need. Most of it is just questions, honestly, a lot of the toolkit is inquiry-based, times of reflection to think about your relationship to discipline, to think about your values, to think about how your daily things and interactions either reflect or reject your values. What are those values? A lot of this starts with education and understanding. The point is for people to read and think "oh, wait, I didn't know that," "oh, but I didn't know that either," "oh, for real, well then we have to do something about that." I think the idea of political education is to shine the light and illuminate the truth. And you can then take the truth and do with it what you will, hopefully, what you will do is something that is bending the arc towards justice.

Just quickly so that our viewers can see here, a little bit of what the toolkit is like and looks like. And we do want to get back to chatting in a moment. So the toolkit does have bunches of things and we do have some quick reasons for why, why not, why police-free schools. Why do we not need to have police or why do we not want to have police in our schools. I just wanted to broadcast this so folks could see what some of the writing is like and what are some of the reasons that we're asserting. That police compromise access to education. That police presence is traumatizing and retraumatizing. That police evade accountability. That they gobble up funds, a lot of funds, millions and millions and millions of dollars, and think about what we

could do with the money that we give to the police, if that money was invested in our young people in our schools and our teachers and our school communities and our families. Also that school police are police and they are not counselors and that they have been tasked with things that are not their duties and responsibilities, and I think that is when we get back to that “taking back the power.” Putting the responsibility to take care of our young people and our school communities back into the hands of our communities. That’s just a little quick preview of what the toolkit looks like. I’m jumping around.

TOOL 1.4 B

12 QUICK REASONS FOR POLICE-FREE SCHOOLS

1. **School Police Compromise Access to Education** by imposing a pathway from classrooms to police cars, precincts, and courts – violently separating young people from their schools

2. **School Police Make Students Less Safe** by escalating everyday issues and responding with the tools of policing – handcuffs, arrests, searches, and uses of force and violence

3. **School Police Target Black, Latinx, and Indigenous Students**, who in 2019, represented 67% of the New York City student population but 91% of all school-based arrests

4. **School Police Evade Accountability** because school police misconduct complaints go to the NYPD, and school police answer to the NYPD, not to the principals or the school community where they’re deployed

5. **School Police Gobble up Public Funds** year after year, with the cost of school policing reaching \$451 million in NYC this coming school year – and tens of millions more spent on safety and security infrastructure, like student surveillance technologies

6. **School Police Uphold Unjust Laws**, solely functioning as a tool of control and repression. Police in schools most often enforce “disorderly conduct,” a catchall category of behavior used at officer’s discretion to restrict student autonomy in their schools

7. **School Police Threaten Public Health**, by using policing to respond to students in mental health or emotional crisis with force and coerced hospitalization or by police responses to student drug or substance use in lieu of harm reduction

8. **School Policing Continues to Expand**, pushing the boundaries of what school policing actually is. By rebranding police as counselors, spending millions on retraining in so-called “restorative practices” and Collaborative Problem Solving, and implementing marketing strategies like “Team Up Tuesdays” – school police are encroaching into more areas of young people’s lives where they don’t belong

9. **School Police Presence is Traumatizing and Re-Traumatizing**, as it attempts to normalize routine stops and student surveillance, and it carries with it a threat of imminent violence as State Law affords school police & peace officers the legal authority to use physical and deadly force

10. **School Police Operate At the Expense of Meeting Students’ Needs**, resources that should go to changing the material conditions of students’ lives get funneled into a hyper-funded NYPD, increasing policing at the expense of real solutions

11. **School Police are Police, not Counselors** and relying on school police to be kind does not reduce their power to harm anyone – we must reduce their power and presence, not rely on their benevolence or personal discretion to ignore the duties outlined in their job descriptions

12. **School Policing is a Tool to Suppress Resistance** that uses surveillance and violence to enforce the status quo, and push back on racial justice and liberation movements, like those demanding full access to education and life chances

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SALLY:

Well what that made me think of, I should definitely mention that we know each other and GGE and Teachers Unite are friends and partners because we are involved in the Dignity in Schools Campaign New York, with which we produced a “What do we mean by police-free schools” guide.

NICOLE: Some of our thoughts too, are that we are not reinventing the wheel. We have some thoughts that may be specific to GGE but there is so much work out here, there is so much preexisting knowledge, there are so many people that we are in community with, that we are in relationship with, in coalition with that are doing this work and have been doing this work, like Teachers Unite, for many many years. And to think that this toolkit also uplifts their work and uplifts your work and uplifts things that already exist. Because sometimes we go into spaces, a lot of teachers I work with personally will go “I didn’t know this group was out here” or “I didn’t know this thing existed.” Or “I know that there’s folks doing things but I don’t know how to connect to them or where they are.” So kind of trying to amplify and uplift our work and also the work of the wonderful groups that we are in community with.

Quickly, some of the things that are in the toolkit, some theoretical framework and some history, some workshops, there are some literal tools where you as an administrator or administrators, or if you are a teacher reading the admin preview section, can take these things back to your schools and be like “hey I’d like for us to do this workshop on restorative decision making.” A lot of the tools are also tools that can be used with staff and also with young people. So there’s tools that I’ve personally used in circle groups with young folks and participants and also that I’ve used with adults in leadership team settings. There’s information about school staffing and roles like you have the power to hire people, what are some of the things that you’re thinking about in terms of your hiring practices that sustain a police free school. So all of our questions lead back to – and does this decision, or this value, or this thing that you’re doing build up your ability to sustain police-free schools. And sustain police-free schools, not just like alright we’re making this shift, but we’re doing it, we’re carrying it out, this is something that we hope to see become a reality for times on.

And then there’s a professional development piece, budgeting piece, and consciousness raising piece. Just want y’all to be able to see what this part of the toolkit actually has in it. And finally Sally I just want to say, if you have any last words

of wisdom, parting thoughts, for folks who are here today, about how to do this work. How to do it. What's important. What they should do because we're at September 16th right now, and folks are going back to school. What do we do, now?

SALLY: I always end up saying the same thing, I must sound like a broken record. But I know it's hard because I've tried it myself as a parent. But really, whatever you can do to contribute and develop leadership within whatever it is you have in your school community. Whether it is a parent association, a parent teacher association, a student council, the school leadership team, and working with and finding those like minded friends and parents and allies in those groups to join you so that you're not alone doing it. So that there is somebody else also part of the grassroots leadership, and figuring out how to strengthen and be more representative. I just think it's so important that grassroots work.

What I say to teachers is there's a responsibility to engage with their union to transform it. It's a responsibility if you're really trying to be an accomplice to communities of color, to folks resisting police violence. Educators who have that power, this huge power within the educational stage of New York City, the voting power, a real responsibility to not only engage in a rank and file strategy, not only just to do actions and vote, but really to figure out what is that apparatus and what is a strategic way to develop leadership. The same way we're talking about the school level but to develop your leadership and to understand how it works. Really not too dissimilar from the electoral stage largely I suppose. Find your allies and get to strategizing.

NICOLE: And connect yourself with groups and orgs like Teachers Unite, GGE, DSC-NY and National. Find your people absolutely and connect. Thank you so much Sally. Thank you for not just being here and checking in and chatting with us and supporting this toolkit but for all the work that you've done to lay the foundation for us to even be able to do this. So thank you very much for the work of your organization and for your work personally.