



WESTRIDGE SCHOOL

Westridge Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Updates, June 2020

This provides recent highlights of Westridge work in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

- **DEI in Strategic Plan.** In January of 2020, the school's strategic plan established DEI as one of four primary areas of focus for the next five years (2020-2025) adding resources of time and funding to accelerate the work the school has been doing in this area. The school's prior strategic plan included a stand-alone Commitment to Diversity & Community.
- **Diversity in hiring.** Over the past three years, 40 percent of new faculty and 53 percent of new staff and administrators have been people of color. These include three administrative leadership positions and one academic division director. We are aware that Black/African American and other people of color are underrepresented in our faculty and that this must be a priority as we continue work to increase racial diversity in hiring.
- **Diversity in enrollment.** Westridge has long-standing relationships with organizations that work to introduce students of color to independent schools including The Independent School Alliance, of which we were a founding member in 1985, and A Better Chance, for whom we host the Southwest regional school fair for A Better Chance families. Currently, more than 60 percent of Westridge students self-identify as students of color, yet Black/African American and Latinx students remain underrepresented on our campus and we are working to improve this.
- **Board diversity and professional development.** As of the 2019-2020 school year, 36 percent of the Westridge Board of Trustees were people of color. Board leadership has also been racially diverse, with four of the past six chairs being people of color. The same is true of leadership on the Westridge Parent Association (WPA). Over the past 10 years, half of WPA presidents have been people of color. In recent years, Westridge trustees have participated in anti-bias and gender diversity training and have taken part in conference and workshop sessions on DEI at the CAIS Trustee/School Head Conference.
- **Board-level diversity position.** In 2019 Westridge instituted a Diversity Chair on the board of trustees to elevate DEI conversations at the board level and to liaise with the Faculty & Staff Diversity Task Force.
- **Professional advisor.** After several years of hosting diversity, equity, and anti-bias professional development workshops for faculty, staff, and trustees, in 2019 Westridge engaged Dr. Elizabeth Denevi for an ongoing program of training, as well as consulting on program review and development. Dr. Denevi is a nationally

renowned researcher and thought leader in the areas of diversity, equity, and belonging with more than 25 years of experience.

- **Financial aid.** As part of our effort to support socioeconomic diversity in our school, in the 2019-2020 school year approximately 23% of families received financial aid with \$2.5 million awarded.
- **Transgender student policy.** In the Summer of 2017, the Board of Trustees approved a policy stating that students who question their gender or who are identifying as male may complete their education at Westridge. This was based on the work of a Transgender Taskforce composed of students, faculty and staff, administrators and trustees and followed gender diversity training for all faculty and staff.
- **Faculty and student conferences.** Each year the school sends 13-16 students and faculty to the National Association of Independent Schools' People of Color Conference and Student Diversity Leadership Conference. In addition, students and faculty and staff members have begun attending the White Privilege Conference and Youth Action Council among other conferences in recent years.
- **Faculty On-Campus Training.** For the past six years, Westridge has prioritized equity and inclusion in its professional development programming for all faculty and staff. Outside experts have presented on topics including anti-bias teaching, gender equity, equity, and belonging.
- **Student Affinity Groups.** Last year, Westridge Upper School students formed 21 student affinity groups based on racial, ethnic, religious, gender identity, and ability, among others. (This number varies each year as they are proposed and formed by interested students.) The Middle School introduced its first affinity groups in 2019 and the school plans to extend this program into the Lower School.
- **Student Leadership.** Student Voices is the student leadership organization comprising affinity group heads and students who have attended the Student Diversity Leadership Conference. These student leaders share information they gain attending conferences and school-based training to help educate the broader student body on issues related to DEI. Each year Student Voices puts on six assemblies and hosts conversations on subjects topical at Westridge or in the wider community. A Student Voices elective class was added to the Upper School in 2018 to allow more time to explore themes and plan assemblies. Recent assembly topics have included Environmental Social Justice, Black Excellence at Westridge (during Black History Month), Model Minority Myth, White Savior Complex, Gentrification, and DACA.
- **Student educational trips.** For two years, groups of Upper School students have gone to the U.S. Mexico border to learn firsthand about immigration issues and policy. In March, a group of Upper School students was supposed to take an

educational trip to the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama. (The trip was canceled due to COVID-19.)

- **Faculty & Staff Diversity Committee/Taskforce.** Westridge has had a faculty and staff committee focused on DEI for more than 10 years. In 2018-19, the group evolved into a strategic planning taskforce whose research and analysis formed the basis of the DEI portion of the Westridge Strategic Plan.
- **Multicultural Parent Collaborative (MPC).** For the past decade the Westridge Parent Association's MPC has worked to nurture a campus community that celebrates diversity and prioritizes inclusion by creating spaces for open dialogue and cultural engagement among parents of shared and varied backgrounds. As the school evolves its work in DEI, we are looking at new ways to support our families of color and expand our conversations on race, racism, and equity within our community.
- **Increased budgetary resources.** The school dedicates significant financial resources to training and other work to forward institutional DEI efforts, and throughout the years our generous alumnae have contributed significant funds through gifts and endowed funds for DEI. Our financial commitment has recently expanded through our new strategic plan and we have made it a priority to fundraise to increase opportunities. Last year, an alumna who wishes to remain anonymous contributed \$150,000 for DEI initiatives at Westridge.