



# Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Community

*Making Us Stronger*

## Gill St. Bernard's School Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Community (DEIC) Action Plan Update October 2020

In June, as part of Gill St. Bernard's School's commitment to improving and enhancing the racial, ethnic, and multicultural climate in our school, we adopted the *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Community (DEIC) Action Plan*. Aligned with the school's [2019-2024 Strategic Plan](#), the Action Plan details the sustainable, concrete steps that support and strengthen our community and create a more inclusive and equitable GSB School. This is an update on the progress to date on these actions.

### Phase I: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT Completed September 2020

While Phase I is complete, we continue to connect our community members across diverse platforms and engage in dialogues to promote understanding, acceptance, and inclusion.

**Goal: Community building through connecting and engaging with others through dialogue on exploring issues of race, bias, and privilege**

Since June, we held numerous discussion groups throughout our community that engaged our students, parents, faculty, staff, alumni, administrators, and our Board of Trustees. These conversations have been critical as we continue to listen to and amplify the perspectives and experiences within our community. As we moved into the start of the new academic year, we continued these conversations with a focus on connecting the groups and holding cross-community dialogues. We will continue to host these sessions monthly to provide a space for our community to learn and grow from each other.

**Goal: Professional development for senior administration, faculty, and staff to improve and enhance the racial, ethnic, and multicultural climate in our school**

Over the summer, we provided a wide range of professional development for our faculty, staff, administrators, and Board of Trustees centered on race, cultural identity, bias, and privilege. These seminars, workshops, and presentations were provided by NAIS, NJAIS, Facing History and Ourselves, Global Education Benchmark Group, The Glasgow Group, Pollyanna, among others. During our August all-school workshop, [Elizabeth Williams Riley, Director of the American Conference on Diversity](#), facilitated a seminar centered on examining our cultural identities, biases, and privilege. In addition, we engaged in several community book discussions for *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* by Jason Reynolds and Dr. Ibram X. Kendhi, *Biased*, by Dr. Jennifer Eberhart, *Transforming the Elite: Black Students and the Desegregation of Private Schools*, by Michelle Purdy, and *A Young People's History of the United States*, by Howard Zinn. These discussions were critical to providing our faculty with the necessary platforms to examine and assess their curriculum as it connects to race, racial identities, lived experiences, and inclusion.

In December, a GSB faculty cohort will participate in NAIS' People of Color Conference (PoCC), which is the flagship of the National Association of Independent Schools' commitment to equity and justice in teaching, learning, and organizational development. The mission of the conference is to provide a safe space for leadership, professional development, and networking for people of color and allies of all backgrounds in independent schools.

**Goal: Utilize Home Winds Farm for academic and service programs that bring diverse and inclusive experiences to GSB and the surrounding community**

A land acknowledgement is a formal statement to honor and respect the indigenous peoples as the original stewards of our land. The land on which we reside is a living representation of our history, both geological and geographical. When we acknowledge the history of the land, we recognize and respect those that stewarded the land before us, and this reminds us that we must be stewards for future generations.

We continue to research the history of the Lenni Lanape people as it connects to the GSB campus. This research is critical to framing a respectful and appropriate land acknowledgement. Led by Lynn Prosen and Dr. Montana Vasquez Grinnell, this research will help us develop a meaningful statement that becomes a part of our school culture, exemplifies our core values and mission statement, and is integrated into our current diversity and inclusion statement. Ultimately, the land acknowledgement will be culturally responsive, support social justice, and promote multicultural education.

**Goal: Expand access to GSB with the goal of achieving the broadest diversity**

This summer, we expanded the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with the appointment of Candace Pryor Brown as Assistant Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and the funding of three equity and inclusion liaisons: Dr. Montana Vasquez Grinnell, Cendahl Cornelio-Alter, and Julie Jurken. This expansion allowed us to deepen our support to students and families throughout all three divisions and, more specifically, to create a cross-divisional network of resources and support for our students and families who are Black, African American, and Latinx.

**Goal: Communicate DEIC Action Plan to the broader GSB community**

We expanded the visibility of our [DEIC efforts on our website](#) and on social media platforms to provide an accessible location for our DEIC initiatives and programs. As we continue to make progress with the next phases of the action plan, we will continue to update the community regularly.

## Phase II: CURRICULUM AND PHILOSOPHY

### To be completed by June 2021

We are now well within Phase II, and this work is already in progress with our faculty, staff, and administrators.

#### **Goal: Expand the curriculum with a global and multicultural focus within and across divisions**

We began examining and expanding our curriculum in all three divisions that support the diversity of experiences, history, and perspectives reflective of the broader community and, more specifically, the Black, African American, and Latinx community. In extension, we elevated our recognition of cultural heritage months starting with National Hispanic Heritage Month on September 15, as well as religious observances of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. These efforts include divisional assemblies, highlighted resources on our website, and visual representations within our academic buildings and social media spaces. As we continue to recognize cultural heritage months throughout the year, we will broaden and expand the narratives in our classrooms.

#### **Goal: Provide resources to ensure all GSB students and families can fully participate in the life of the school**

Three new Upper School student affinity groups were formed: the Asian Culture Club, the Latin American Heritage and Culture Club, and the Middle Eastern Culture Club. Two groups were initiated by students and the other by a faculty member who was inspired by their own diversity work over the summer. The affinity spaces have been well received by the student body. The Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion will support their initiatives.

We established the GSB Parents of Color Forum, a supportive, collaborative network of GSB parents and students of Black, African American, and Latinx descent to foster equity and inclusion in our curriculum and community. Led by parents Diane Anglin P '22, Diane McQueen P '22, Caroline Mentis P '24, and Daphney Mgbako P '23, the group met several times since this summer, welcomed new families to our school community, and began programming to connect students and families with each other. In addition, we established the Alumni of Color Affinity Group, as well as the Faculty and Staff of Color Affinity Group as spaces to support and network with each other. These two new groups also met several times over the past several months. Finally, the Parents' Association established the Parents' Association Diversity Committee with Chairs Antoinette Segreto P '32 and Reema Puri P '19, '21. This committee has partnered with the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to support our recognition of cultural heritage months and plan ways to engage parents in activities, conversations, and special events to support diversity, equity, and inclusion within our community.

#### **Goal: Ensure that all GSB students have an equitable opportunity to thrive both academically and socially**

We continue to support all students socially, emotionally, and academically. In partnership with our school counselors, we are in the process of identifying areas of greatest need for supporting student wellness. Under the direction of the GSB School Counselor Emily Haberman, The Independent School Health Check will be administered to the Upper School students. This comprehensive survey will identify areas of concern within the student body, including issues of identity, race, ethnicity, and inclusion. We continue to research sources that can provide supportive counseling services, including retaining a LCSW counselor of color.

Equally important to the social-emotional well-being of our students is empowering them to engage in school life as their authentic selves. This December, GSB was selected as a participating school for the [National Student Diversity Leadership Conference \(SDLC\)](#). SDLC is a multiracial, multicultural gathering of upper school student leaders (grades 9-12) from across the United States and abroad. SDLC focuses on self-reflecting, forming allies, and building community. Led by a diverse team of trained adult and peer facilitators, six GSB students will develop cross-cultural communication skills, design effective strategies for social justice practice through dialogue and the arts and learn the foundations of allyship and networking principles. This will be the first year that GSB will send a student cohort.

**Goal: GSB to host a Middle School Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion conference for area Middle School students in grades 7-8**

On Thursday, October 15, GSB will host its inaugural Middle School Equity and Inclusion Summit for 130 students representing 14 regional independent schools. “See Us. Hear Us. Empowering Students to be Change Agents in their School” is designed to provide middle school students with a space to explore their current experiences and develop cross-cultural communication skills. The keynote speaker for this conference is Dr. Rodney Glasgow, founding member and Chair of the National Association of Independent School’s annual Student Diversity Leadership Conference. GSB is taking the lead to provide a space for students to connect across schools and engage in conversations that will amplify their thoughts and perspectives around equity, inclusion, and belonging in our communities.

**Goal: Articulate and communicate our curriculum and philosophy in this area to the broader community**

The DEIC team continues to explore curriculum options to support division teachers with the infusion of other voices and experiences in their curricula. Several DEIC members previewed *Pollyanna*, a PreK - 8 interdisciplinary, racial literacy curriculum that would enhance and expand many of the current thematic units; we are investigating its adoption. At present, members of the DEIC Team are assisting Lower School teachers refocus their Native American and Thanksgiving units to reflect cultural sensitivity, the broader meaning of community, and agency of present-day Native American communities. We will continue to share the progress we are making with our curriculum and educational philosophy with the broader community.

The Middle and Upper School divisions are also approaching this work with intentionality. Both divisions are in the process of assessing classroom and curricular materials, books, and texts. By identifying areas within the curriculum to change, enhance, or broaden allows for a wide scope of voices, perspectives, and lived experiences. This work is being done with a critical eye to eliminate texts and materials that rely on or perpetuate negative cultural stereotypes and offensive language.

**Goal: Engage Board of Trustees in DEIC development and accountability**

In July, the Board of Trustees established a Board-level committee focused on DEIC to oversee and ensure the accountability of the action plan in our community. The Board engaged in discussions centered on the role of bias and privilege, as well as participated in DEIC training facilitated by the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

For more information, contact Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion  
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