



A Place to Belong: Living Diversity at SPA

At the heart of St. Paul Academy and Summit School's diversity work is the belief that an educational community is at its best when it includes and values all voices, perspectives, and experiences. At SPA, maintaining an inclusive environment is inherent to our mission and evident in our community: 34% of children enrolled at SPA are students of color. Our faculty and staff also represent a broad range of diverse identities with regard to race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, and sexual orientation.

All members of the SPA community—students, faculty, staff, and parents—are accountable for creating and sustaining a climate of understanding, safety, and respect. SPA is a place where people feel comfortable expressing who they are and what they believe, regardless of race, gender, religion, learning style, political views, sexual orientation, or economic status. All SPA faculty and staff are trained to use the Courageous Conversations About Race (CCAR) protocol for addressing race and other topics of difference through safe, authentic, and effective dialogue.

We seek to prepare SPA students to be thoughtful, curious, and engaged citizens of our increasingly global and interconnected world. Multicultural perspectives are woven throughout the K-12 curriculum in age-appropriate ways that spark students' interest and deepen their understanding of individual, national, and global identity.

- ◆ The Lower School curriculum emphasizes themes of people and their history, geography, and cultures. Interdisciplinary units focus on Minnesota's indigenous people; the African, Mayan, and Hawaiian cultures; and immigration in America. Programming includes the Lower School partnership with Penumbra Theater and many special events and speakers throughout the year. The Lower School offers a K-5 Students of Color affinity group.

- ◆ In the Middle School, the work with Penumbra intensifies and deepens, as does student exploration of identity and difference in English and Social Studies coursework. Affinity and interest groups are offered to Middle School students for support and discussion. In past years, groups have included a Gender and Sexuality Club; groups for African American, Jewish, and Muslim students; and a female empowerment group.
- ◆ The Upper School's curricular and extracurricular offerings are robust and match students' growing sophistication and interest in complex issues of diversity and identity. Courses delving into these issues include History of Race, Gender In the Americas, History of the Refugee Community, World Religions, New Global Voices, and Literature of Resistance. Student organizations include affinity groups for African American girls and boys, the Muslim Student Association, the Gender and Sexuality Acceptance Club, and HerSpace, among many others. Interested students organize the annual Martin Luther King Jr. assembly, attend the national Student Diversity Leadership Conference, and participate in activities ranging from speakers on social issues to performances by Common Ground, a multi-cultural affinity group in the Upper School.

At SPA, diversity is much more than a buzzword. Everyone's voice is essential here, and we work hard to ensure that every student and parent finds a place to belong in our community. As a Lower School student responded when asked about SPA's diversity, "Everyone fits in here even if you're just being yourself; no one feels different or alone."



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Diversity FAQs

How does St. Paul Academy and Summit School define “diversity”?

The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), of which SPA is a member, defines diversity as a community of people of different races, ethnicities, socioeconomic classes, sexual orientations, and religions. It is difficult to determine exact percentages for many of these categories, but we do know that at SPA 34% of the student body is African American, Asian American, Latino, Middle Eastern American, Native American, and/or multiracial, which is similar to the NAIS national average. At SPA, however, the concept of diversity goes much deeper than numbers: the school embraces a climate and culture of pluralism and inclusion. We are committed to creating and maintaining a welcoming, safe, and inclusive environment for all our community members.

Does SPA have official policies that relate to diversity?

Yes. Read our Board of Trustees’ Resolution on Diversity and the school’s Diversity Action Plan at www.spa.edu/about/diversity.

How does SPA engage with issues of diversity outside the classroom?

Students and faculty are regularly engaged in multi-cultural enrichment outside of the classroom. Past guest speakers have included local storyteller Nothando Zulu, who explored African American history with Lower Schoolers; Aamera Siddiqui, whose As American as Curry Pie monologue depicts her family’s journey to becoming American citizens; and actor T. Mychal Rambo and his rousing one-man performance as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The school’s ongoing relationship with Penumbra Theatre is built into the experiential learning program in the Lower and Middle Schools. In addition, SPA staff and faculty are engaged in ongoing professional development related to equity and diversity. Organizations such as Tolerance Minnesota and the Islamic Resource Group have shared information and tools on timely and relevant issues affecting our community. In 2016, the school implemented the “Courageous Conversations” program, a protocol developed by the Pacific Educational Group (PEG) to help engage and sustain meaningful and productive dialogue about race in K-12 schools. PEG works with communities at the systemic level, recognizing that it is not just diversity initiatives and activities that transform a school, but that “effectively examining organizational culture” is essential for equity and justice to both be achieved and sustained.

What is the role of the Director of Intercultural Life?

Naomi Taylor, the Director of Intercultural Life, works with the K-12 community to create and implement policy, practices, and programming that help build a diverse and inclusive community. The Director is a mentor, advocate, and resource to children and families in the community; she regularly visits classes, works with teachers on curriculum development, advises student diversity groups, and acts as a liaison to parent groups. The Director also teaches Middle School wellness units. The Director maintains strong connections with local, regional, and national educators’ organizations to ensure that SPA is following national standards and best practices in supporting our diverse student body.

How can I be involved in SPA’s diversity and inclusion efforts?

All children and families bring diversity to the SPA community in some way, and there are many ways to share your family’s unique perspective at school. Parents may attend or volunteer at community celebrations or in classrooms, attend meetings and presentations on diversity initiatives sponsored by the parent associations, and work with the Director of Intercultural Life on developing special projects related to diversity or community education. We welcome your participation! Please contact Naomi Taylor, your Principal, or any faculty or staff member for more information.

To learn more about diversity at SPA, we invite you to contact Dr. Naomi Taylor, Director of Intercultural Life, at 651-696-1378 or ntaylor@spa.edu.



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