



A Place to Belong: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

At the heart of SPA's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) 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: 38% of children enrolled at SPA in 2021-22 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.

The school strives to support students in the development of skills that promote collaboration across, and understanding of, diverse identities, perspectives, opinions, values, and experiences. Everyone's voice is essential here, and we work hard to ensure that every student has the opportunity to thrive, and every family finds a place to belong in our community.

We use the Courageous Conversations About Race (CCAR) protocols for addressing race and other topics of difference through safe, authentic, and effective dialogue, and all faculty and staff receive training and ongoing professional development in using these protocols in the classroom and in their professional lives at school.

THE CURRICULUM

The curriculum prepares 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. Recent interdisciplinary units have focused on Minnesota's Indigenous people; the African, Mayan, and Hawaiian

cultures; and immigration in America. Programming includes partnerships with local community organizations and many special events and speakers throughout the year. The Lower School offers an affinity group for students of color in grades K-5 called Common Ground Junior.

The Middle School program considers DEI as a central focus in building community and moving students from exploration and awareness to advocacy and belonging. Positive identity development is increasingly central to the Advisory curriculum and is an academic goal in coursework. Middle School affinity groups and special interest groups meet each week for discussion and support. Affinity groups in 2021-22 include Black and Brown Males, Common Ground, Herspace, Mishpacha, and Muslim Student Alliance. Special interest groups include Gender and Sexuality Alliance, Intercultural Club, Neurodiversity, and White Ally/Anti-Racist, among others.

The Upper School program reflects students' growing sophistication and interest in complex issues of diversity and identity. Courses addressing these issues include History of Race, Gender In the Americas, History of the Refugee Community, World Religions, Global Studies, and Literature of Resistance. Student organizations include both affinity and student interest groups with a focus on social justice. Upper School affinity groups include the Black Student Union, Gender and Sexuality Alliance, Common Ground, and HerSpace, among many others; these groups provide a safe space for students to explore and engage in meaningful dialogue around race, gender and other aspects of identity. Every year, SPA sends students to participate in the annual Student Diversity Leadership Conference (SDLC), an annual student conference held in conjunction with the National Association of Independent Schools' People of Color Conference.

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 in 2021-22, 38% of the SPA student body is African American, Asian American, Latino, Middle Eastern American, Native American, and/or multiracial, above the NAIS national average of 30.9%. 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?

SPA is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) for every student, family, and faculty/staff member, regardless of race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, home or first language, religion, national origin, or age. This commitment is reflected in institutional policies that include the Diversity and Inclusion Policy (2017) and the Guidelines in Support of Gender Diversity (2018). In addition, the school's Defining Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion task force was created in 2020 to examine the intersection between our ideals as we strive to create a vibrant and equitable pluralism and life at school as a lived experience.

How does SPA engage with students, faculty/staff, and families about cultural differences?

In 2016, the school implemented the “Courageous Conversations About Race” 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 Office of Intercultural Life?

The Office of Intercultural Life is a K-12 administrative unit with two full-time staff members who oversee the school's diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and initiatives. The Director of Intercultural Life reports to

the Head of School and Assistant Head of School for Student Development and Community Engagement, and is charged with defining and directing institutional DEI initiatives and policies. The Director oversees the student experience at school with a lens of equity and inclusion, and engages in community outreach to support initiatives in student and family programming, professional development, admissions, recruiting/hiring and retention, and community partnerships.

The Intercultural Life Program Specialist (ILPS) partners with the Director of Intercultural Life to support DEI student and community programming in the Middle and Upper Schools. The ILPS works with students and faculty on issues of identity development and a shared language and understanding related to anti-bias education and culturally responsive practices within the SPA community. The ILPS also advises Middle and Upper School affinity and special interest groups, teaches Middle School wellness units, and leads cultural programming and professional development.

How can I be involved in SPA's diversity, equity, 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 DEI initiatives sponsored by the parent associations, and work with the Office of Intercultural Life on developing special projects related to DEI or community education. We welcome your participation!

To learn more about diversity, equity, and inclusion 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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