

# WESTRIDGE SCHOOL

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice

► Update ◀  
JANUARY 2023



Once again, I have the privilege to present our formal Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) report. Our past reports have focused on significant work in building the infrastructure to support school growth in DEIJ and the numerous activities and programs on campus. As you will see in the following pages, there remains a great deal of this type of DEIJ activity at Westridge.

But with that said, this past semester, our work entered a new phase that looks and feels a bit different because it emphasizes the personal and interpersonal work of DEIJ. This phase is, in large part, what we are referring to when we speak of the hard work of DEIJ. And it is where culture change truly takes place.

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### Our current focus has two main branches:

- Creating the road map to make inclusive space for all students as the diversity of our community grows.
- Introducing restorative practices and other conversations to help build relationships, mend fractures when they occur on campus, and simultaneously build cultural competency skills.

### CREATING AN INCLUSIVE SPACE

Central to developing a road map to a more inclusive campus has been shifting the focus of my work this year from larger groups to working with smaller groups and one-on-one with faculty, staff, and students.

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Together, we are exploring DEIJ aspects of deeper learning—learning that welcomes a collaborative approach to teaching and learning and centers risk and vulnerability.

In addition, we are thinking about how we measure student growth and having conversations about equitable grading that measures competencies over compliance. Our goal is to be more intentional regarding equitable grading practices to ensure we re-think student assessment with a bias-resistant lens.

We started small last year with the Lower and Middle School to build community and address conflicts. This year our work continues in small groups or restorative chats. The approach is used in challenging conversations with students and adults around diversity and inclusion, where we face the things that would ordinarily make us withdraw or become silent. We are also training others in the practice. For instance, members of the Upper School Student Honor Council are currently going through a series of restorative practices workshops.

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The next step in building the roadmap to an inclusive space is to welcome feedback and use it to inform the next steps of the DEIJ journey. To that end, I am excited about the connections that I am making with students. Students now regularly stop by my office or ask to speak to me on campus about their ideas to help build the program or discuss their concerns. I believe this level of access helps them feel heard, gives them a sense of belonging, and signals that it is okay to ask for guidance.

### RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

Our second area of focus this year is restorative practices, an approach to community building and conflict resolution that involves all parties and focuses on repairing the harm that has been done. It is vital to know that a core tenet of these practices is cultivating solid relationships before problems occur and that restorative practices began with indigenous people.

### ADMISSION & CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Our work to till the ground and make space for more diverse people and ideas at Westridge starts with honoring our commitment to becoming an anti-racist institution. The standardized entrance examination has been removed from our admission process to support an equity-focused process and families are asked to share their understanding and experiences specific to DEIJ. In addition, the Curriculum and Academic Standards Committee (CASC) has added a DEIJ question to new course proposals. It requests information on how students will experience our commitment to inclusivity, diverse perspectives, and an equitable approach to learning in the classroom.

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With DEIJ, we should consider what dissuades people from readily engaging in discussions and how we may offer support to break the cycles of fear and uncertainty that hinder us from taking a chance to become our bravest, best selves.

Equity work is not easy or tidy. The desire to offer a quick fix is natural given our inclination to heal what seems broken or avoid what feels uncomfortable. But the conversations we are having provide us with permission to slow down and allow space for discourse between students and educators around DEIJ themes. And our focus on the personal and interpersonal provides more freedom to express our doubts, reservations, and convictions. This, in turn, helps to avoid performative acts that do not build sustainable change.

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## SIGNS OF CHANGE

While the phase we are in is not showy, I can tell you that the seeds we are sowing are already sparking change on our campus. Students are using their voices to amplify issues that matter to them and questioning how they can be better involved in making their school a place where those who attend feel like they belong. Adults are engaging in equity in many ways, and I am pleased to have been included in some of those discussions. I have been invited by teachers to help in lesson planning around important, and sometimes sensitive, topics related to DEIJ in their subjects. Parents are dropping by or inviting me to coffee to chat more about questions specific to DEIJ to ensure they learn and grow alongside their children. These are signs of engagement and growth!

I am glad to be a part of a community that remains committed to equity work. Witnessing the investment in DEIJ and the changes that have occurred in my short time at Westridge has been inspiring. I want to urge us to make room for others, embrace discomfort, let go of the notion that the process has to be flawless, allow mistakes, and actively support one another because we are stronger when we work together. I am honored to lead this valuable work at Westridge and look forward to our continuous growth in diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

In solidarity,

**Ian Tatum**  
Director of Equity

# Foundation for DEIJ & Anti-Racist Work

## DATA ANALYSIS PROJECT

Twelve years worth of academic and enrollment data has been sent to a third-party expert for analysis in order to help illuminate areas of hidden bias and inequity at Westridge. Specific areas under review include course placement, grades, and attrition trends. Many thousands of individual data points for all grades, 4-12, were anonymized and standardized in preparation for review.

## RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

Last spring Ian Tatum began introducing restorative practices, a method of addressing social problems that emphasizes accountability/ taking ownership of mistakes, personal growth through mistakes, and repairing harm to others over punitive responses. Relationship building is a core principle of restorative practices. Tatum and Lower & Middle School Director Dr. Zanita Kelly have been formally trained in restorative practices and Tatum plans to expand the practice to additional community members throughout the school.

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# Education & Programming/Students

## REVIEW OF TRADITIONS: INTERIM WEEK REDESIGN & FINANCIAL AID EXPANSION

In the Upper School, Interim Week (renamed Discovery Week) will now offer a more uniform experience with all students taking part in programs and trips across three themes:

- **9th & 10th grade:** Who are you and where do you come from? (programs focused on participation in and/or understanding of our local community and providing exposure to Los Angeles history and social and civic issues)
- **Juniors:** Who is America? (domestic overnight trips that include cultural and outdoor experiences focused on providing different perspectives on our nation)

- **Seniors:** What does it mean to be a citizen of the world? (international trips where students will take part in cultural, political, or service opportunities outside of the United States, learning how to engage as an “outsider” in the global community)

As of the 2022-2023 school year, all juniors will attend a domestic trip (beyond Los Angeles) and all seniors will participate in an international trip, as the school has committed to providing financial assistance as required for families for whom trip costs present a hardship.

## Education & Programming/Students

### MIDDLE SCHOOL JEDI PROGRAM

JEDI (a remix of the acronym DEIJ to lead with justice) is a program to develop student literacy and competence around the issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice that was introduced in the Middle School this year. Led by Dean of Lower & Middle School Student Voices Tamara Jaffe '08, the program centers on once-a-schedule-rotation JEDI Alliance assemblies designed to help students understand identity and the concepts of being a force for putting things right—being an upstander—in the pursuit of justice and equity. Topics this fall included courageous conversations (discussing protocols to have difficult conversations) and family heritage focusing on intergenerational experiences.

### RESTORATIVE PRACTICES TRAINING/UPPER SCHOOL HONOR COUNCIL

This fall, Ian Tatum held a two-part training in restorative practices with the Upper School Honor Council. This 12-member body, currently in its pilot year, discusses instances of community conduct which fail to promote the values of the school. Restorative practices provides a framework for our students to think about how to empathetically listen and approach infractions from a perspective of looking at the harm that was caused but keeping students whole throughout the process.

### CURRICULUM CONTEXT SETTING FOR COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

Following the Lower & Middle School curriculum audit that identified where DEIJ topics currently appear in the curriculum, academic leadership

and DEIJ staff have been working to provide faculty and students with context setting and preparation for critical, difficult, and sensitive conversations. For example, in October before the 8th grade saw the play “The Face of Emmett Till,” Dr. Kelly and Mr. Tatum met with the class to convey the serious nature of the play, explain that this wasn’t an entertainment experience, and prepare the class for the difficult history they would be exposed to in the play. Following the play, they participated in a debrief with the students and provided additional time and space for students who were struggling with processing the material.

### DEIJ TOPIC EXPANSION/LOWER SCHOOL COUNCIL

The Lower School Council program has long focused on the issue of friendship and being a member of a community. This fall, that work expanded to include developmentally appropriate conversations of identity (e.g. introvert, extrovert, who they are as learners, personality traits), and personal values. This new view is critical to building healthy friendships and navigating normal social issues and is foundation to restorative practices.

### STUDENT DIVERSITY LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE:

Six Upper School students attended the 2023 Student Diversity Leadership Conference (SDLC) in San Antonio, Texas. SDLC is an annual event hosted by the National Association of Independent Schools attended by thousands of students from across the country.



## Education & Programming/Students

### MIDDLE SCHOOL AFFINITY GROUPS

This year 79 Middle School students — twice as many as last year — have joined the division's five affinities, one of which is new this year, Neurodivergent. In a new program element, during the second semester affinity groups will suggest and present on topics to the Middle School student body during JEDI assemblies.

### UPPER SCHOOL AFFINITY GROUPS

This fall Upper School students established 20 affinity groups for students of different racial, religious, ethnic, gender, family structure, and sexual orientation identities. Students formed a neurodiversity affinity group for the first time.

### STUDENT ASSEMBLIES & TALKS (since our last report)

#### April

- Allies for the Disabled Community assembly
- Student Voices collaboration with Allies for the Disabled Community (included a service opportunity with Best Buddies, a nonprofit that works to end the social, physical, and economic isolation of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities)
- Silent Movement Town Meeting (Student attendees of the Student Diversity Leadership Conference engaged Upper School students in activity from the conference)
- Middle School Black Student Union JEDI Alliance Club assembly
- Upper School Middle Eastern Affinity hosted a presentation on Ramadan for the Middle School
- Lower School Pride Assembly & Parade
- Pride Spirit Day Dance party at Upper School lunch

#### May

- Student Voices Gives Thanks Assembly (honoring staff who often go unrecognized)

- Middle School Affinity Heads introduced 6th grade students to the Middle School affinity group program in preparation for Fall 2022
- Middle School Alliance Meeting with Zanita Kelly and Ian Tatum discussing the different roles of affinity groups and alliance groups. This was important for clarification due to the rapid expansion of student involvement in these groups.
- Black Student Union End-of-Year Celebration and Senior Send-off

#### September

- Jewish Affinity: apples & honey event for all divisions for Rosh Hashanah
- Hispanic Heritage Month activities: highlighting LatinExcellence (guest speaker, paper picado crafting, affinity potluck, lunch time salsa lessons with affinity heads)
- Middle School Affinity and Alliance Fair
- Upper School Affinity Fair
- Middle School JEDI Assembly: Courageous, Conscientious Conversation—best practices for engaging in identity-based conversations

#### October

- Upper School Community Gathering hosted by the Middle Eastern and North African affinity (discussion of current events in Iran related to women and hijab)
- Diwali activities organized by the South Asian affinity (sand decorating activity and celebration of food)
- Día de los Muertos (ofrenda in the Main Hall and sweet bread served at lunch to all students)
- Student Voices: Creative Coping through the Pandemic (all divisions)

#### November & December

Middle School JEDI Assemblies:

- An Immigrant's Experience: AAPI Affinity tells their immigrant stories and invited others to share their stories
- Circle of Care: Family Heritage
- Introduction to Gender Identity: Exploring the Individual and External Experiences
- Upper School Assembly: discussion of the history and importance of Yam Festival

## Education & Programming: Employees

### **ALL EMPLOYEE MEETING: BUILDING AN EQUITY LENS**

Following a presentation, employees broke into groups to discuss the following questions:

- When thinking about DEI, how can we embed equity work into the structure of Westridge (e.g., Board, employees, staffing, mission, vision, policy, practices, procedures, and resources)?
- When thinking about equity work as an employee, what would be helpful to build competencies for professional growth in DEI (e.g., specific resources, working groups, a core group of equity agents, language, guidance in particular areas, etc.)?
- When considering equity work, what are essential components for self-work for growth in DEI (e.g., openness, reflection, assessing comfort, embracing discomfort, readiness, creating a personal map for ongoing work, etc.)

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### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT/ COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS**

In October, Dr. Kelly and Mr. Tatum attended the National Summit for Courageous Conversations, a conference held in Washington D.C. on the impact of race on opportunity and achievement for all students.

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT/ PEOPLE OF COLOR CONFERENCE**

In December, a team of four faculty and staff members attended the People of Color Conference in San Antonio, Texas. The conference is hosted by the National Association of Independent Schools and is the flagship conference for leadership, professional development, and networking for people of color and allies of all backgrounds in independent schools.



## Education & Programming: Parents

### **VIRTUAL WESTRIDGE PARENT ASSOCIATION (WPA) MEETINGS**

In order to make WPA meetings accessible to more members of the parent community, the decision was made to host a majority of WPA meetings online this year. During the pandemic, we learned that many more people could attend online meetings that eliminate long commutes, childcare and work conflicts, and the like.

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### **PARENT EDUCATION SESSION/ WAACH GROUP SUPPORT**

In May, Dr. Dawn Lee Tu, an equity and social justice strategist and educator, met with Westridge Asian American Culture and Heritage (WAACH) Affinity families to discuss how parents can support students in conversations related to DEIJ and how parents can communicate their needs to the school.

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### **LA COMUNIDAD LATINX DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS ALL-SCHOOL GATHERING**

Comunidad Latinx, Westridge's Latinx parent affinity group hosted a social and cultural event this November for all Westridge families. A detailed presentation explained the history, importance, and symbolism specific to Día de los Muertos. Día de los Muertos traditions of face painting, skull decorating, and music were highlighted, and a potluck meal was shared.

### **WPA NIGHT MARKET**

This annual spring event, founded several years ago by the WPA, focuses on connection and shared cultures through food, games, activities, and entertainment from around the globe. It was even more special in April as the first all-school, in-person gathering of 2022.

Student affinity, parent cultural groups, and Westridge classes had tables to share cultures from all around the world, including Latinx/ Hispanic, Polish, Korean, Jewish, Armenian, Chinese, and Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) heritages.

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### **PARENTS OF STUDENTS WITH NEURODIVERSITY AFFINITY GROUP MEETINGS**

During the fall, the Parents of Students with Neurodiversity Affinity Group met monthly for coffee and discussion. In December, the group heard from Dr. Ashley Taylor, a licensed clinical pediatric psychologist. Last school year, the group also heard from The Center for Connection Educational Therapist Tiffanie Hoang as well as Westridge learning support specialists Tami Millard and Susie Murdock.



# Community Diversity

## DIVERSITY OF STUDENT BODY

In the current 2022-2023 school year 69% of the Westridge student body identify as students of color with:

- 7.1% identifying as Black/African American or multiracial Black/African American,
- 15.6% identifying as Latinx or multiracial Latinx,
- 33% identifying as Asian or Asian American.

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## BOARD UPDATES/BOARD CHAIR

Alumna Valerie Rubio Lemmon '92, who has served as trustee since 2020, assumed the role of board chair this fall and is the first Latinx person to chair the Westridge Board. Lemmon has spent more than 20 years in finance and holds

an M.B.A. in finance from UC Berkeley Haas School of Business and B.A. in international relations from Stanford University.

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## BOARD UPDATES/DEIJ CHAIR

Joseph Ybarra has been named 2022-2023 DEIJ Chair for the Westridge board of trustees. Ybarra, an attorney, is a founding partner of Halper, May, Ybarra, and Gelberg. He holds a J.D. from the University of Southern California, Gould School of Law, an M.A. in American History from University of Texas at Austin, and a B.A. from Dartmouth College.

