

DEI Strategic Planning Group Recommendations for 2020-2021

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The members of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategic planning group (members of which are listed above) met approximately once a month throughout the academic year to take a closer look at our school's practices and needs along DEI lines, which are core to our mission and critical to any healthy community and strong educational program. We discussed topics related to several of the most commonly discussed identifiers (race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, socioeconomics) and acknowledged the importance of shaping a community that prioritized the dignity of all, regardless of identity.

The following recommendations come from analysis of and conversations with independent schools around the country as well as from our own discussions of our school community. The group recommends that Thaden School

1. Form a DEI Council whose members (by nomination) rotate every two years. The Council will be charged with supporting members of our community in DEI-related education, both developmentally and, when necessary, reactively (i.e., challenging conversations, socioemotional support of students, curriculum development). Ideally, this group is convened by a DEI Council convener tasked with convening sessions, serving as a resource to faculty members, identifying complementary strengths among members of the DEI council, etc.
2. Anticipate and plan for the establishment and coordination of both formal affinity groups and informal gatherings to discuss DEI matters for employees, students, and families. For starters, at the faculty and staff level, these may include annual SEED groups, a group for colleagues of color, and BARWE (Building Anti-Racist White Educators), among other possibilities. At the student and family level, we might offer book, article, or film circles.

3. Reaffirm the institution's commitment to all faculty and staff participating in a SEED group in their first three years after joining the community. Additionally, provide the financial resources to train enough members of the community as SEED leaders to help the institution meet this goal.
4. Incorporate clear DEI expectations in the school's Characteristics of Professional Excellence (CPE) for employee evaluation, including elements of Professional Socioemotional Development that can help school employees in better serving the community.
5. Develop and implement a non-prescriptive grade-appropriate advisory curriculum that centers dignity, reflection, inquiry, and other elements of character education. Possible resources: Cultures of Dignity, Teaching Tolerance, etc.
6. Ahead of hiring cycles, plan and lead discussions with all stakeholders involved in the hiring process regarding our mission and the importance of bias awareness. This may include a conversation about the history of independent schools. Additionally, ensure that all candidate visits feature candid conversations about experience with and commitment to DEI work.
7. Undergo a continual (annual or biannual) revision of hiring and admissions practices (e.g., position descriptions, marketing materials, and recruitment processes), including devoting resources to broad admissions outreach throughout the Northwest Arkansas region and ensuring all hiring visits include conversations about DEI in the context of the school's mission.
8. Establish and maintain an accessible and well-resourced library of texts, conferences, articles, TED Talks, films, and other opportunities for members of the community to access.
9. Leverage existing survey tools (ISM and NAIS surveys, for example) to home in on perceptions of the school's efficacy around matters of DEI.

10. Establish and maintain connections with schools and organizations nationally regarding DEI best practices, especially in the context of shifting and new sociopolitical dynamics.

We look forward to the thoughtful and timely implementation of the aforementioned, which our research has identified as beneficial to the community. The members of this planning group look forward to supporting the school's efforts towards diversity, equity, and inclusion.