

From Assimilation
to Inclusion:
**How White Educators
and Educators of Color
Can Make
Diversity Work**

By Michael Brosnan

AISNE

Association of Independent Schools in New England

www.aisne.org

Dedication

To all diversity practitioners in independent schools — for your commitment to redefining excellence in education, and to bringing about greater equity and justice in the broader culture.

Acknowledgments

This monograph would not be possible without the insights, wisdom, hard work, and generosity of the following educators:

Gene Batiste, vice president for leadership education and diversity, National Association of Independent Schools, Washington, D.C.

Caroline Blackwell, director of multicultural services, University School of Nashville, Tennessee

Lewis Bryant, director of multicultural services, Buckingham Browne & Nichols School, Massachusetts

Holly Carter, professor of education at Northeastern University and diversity consultant to The Chestnut Hill School, Massachusetts, and other independent schools

Randolph Carter, director of the Eastern Educational Resource Collaborative, Washington, D.C.

Elizabeth Denevi, co-director of diversity, Georgetown Day School, Washington, D.C.

Martha Haakmat, diversity coordinator and health coordinator, Packer Collegiate School, New York

Adam Howard, professor of education, Colby College, Maine

Thomas Hoerr, head of school, New City School, Missouri

Pearl Rock Kane, director of the Klingenstein Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York

Ron Kim, history teacher and associate dean of faculty, Phillips Exeter Academy, New Hampshire

Alden Mauck, English teacher, Noble and Greenough School, Massachusetts

Maia Mulligan Kaz, freelance writer and former director of communications, Lakeside School, Washington

Eric Osorio, assistant head of upper school, Packer Collegiate School, New York

Eric Polite, diversity consultant and former director of diversity, The Gordon School, Rhode Island

Robert Principe, Hyatt Center director of educational leadership, Beaver Country Day School, Massachusetts

Veda Robinson, dean of multicultural affairs, Phillips Exeter Academy, New Hampshire

Samuel Robinson, associate director, New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Massachusetts

Rosanna Salcedo, modern language teacher and dean of admissions of the summer school, Phillips Exeter Academy, New Hampshire

Christine Savini, founder and principal consultant, Diversity Directions

Brian Thomas, upper school head, Bentley School, California

T.J. Vassar, coordinator of multicultural education, history teacher, and college counselor at Lakeside School, Washington

Ralph Wales, head of school, The Gordon School, Rhode Island

Tim Wise, author and diversity consultant, Nashville, Tennessee

I also wish to thank Steve Clem, executive director of AISNE, for envisioning, encouraging, and guiding the writing here; and Beth Brosnan for her careful editing and insightful comments.

There are so many others involved in diversity work who, while not consulted directly for this project, have contributed through their actions and words over the years; for all of them, I am grateful.



Introduction

The compelling truths in this world come from all sorts of unexpected places. On the recommendation of a friend, I decided to read Mark Haddon’s novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night*, about an autistic child in England. Around the same time, I knew I’d have to begin preparing this monograph. Little did I suspect that the novel would be a provocative place to start. When the boy in the novel, labeled as a “Special Needs” student, reflects on the meaning of this term, we see immediately that his understanding is one of those compelling truths that force us to reflect on our attitudes. He says in his narration:

I’m meant to say that [students like me] have learning difficulties or that they have special needs. But this is stupid because everyone has learning difficulties because learning to speak French or understand relativity is difficult, and also everyone has special needs, like Father, who

carries a little packet of artificial sweetening tablets around with him to put in his coffee to stop him from getting fat, or Mrs. Peters, who wears a beige-colored hearing aid, or Siobhan, who has glasses so thick that they give you a headache if you borrow them, and none of these people are Special Needs, even if they have special needs.

I don’t know about you, but I’ve had special needs all my life. Still do. Among other things, in school, I was labeled as one who needed help with reading (and, more generally, staying focused on anything a teacher was saying). If I’m being honest about it, the list of my special needs today is still fairly long. I struggle to remember names. I lose patience easily. My eyesight is getting progressively worse. Rarely a day goes by that I don’t forget to do something I told myself not to forget to do. And I still can’t speak another language with anything close to fluency. Drop

me in a country where English isn’t the dominant language and they’ll surely think I’m a Special Needs case. And there are so many things I simply struggle to understand, such as relativity, no matter how many times they are explained to me.

But one thing I do understand is that, in criticizing the thinking of the adults in his life, Mark Haddon’s autistic hero could have easily been talking about the struggle for diversity in schools. Although we are taught not to toss around the word “stupid,” I hope you’ll forgive me for borrowing it here in honor of Haddon’s narrator. It’s stupid to think that poor people aren’t as smart as rich people or that they are poor because they are lazy. It’s stupid to think that schools can cater to the wealthy and a primarily white audience and not do damage to humanity. It’s stupid to think that “being white” doesn’t mean anything — or that cultural identity is only for people of color. It’s stupid to think that children who only have white teachers, or only

have female teachers, aren't missing out on something. It's stupid to think that precollegiate education is primarily about getting children to college.

But maybe the word "stupid" isn't very helpful. Maybe it's better to think more neutrally — in which case, the problem seems to boil down to the problem of defining "normal."

In an interview in *Smithsonian* magazine, anthropologist Roy Richard Grinker, who has an autistic son, says this about autism: "In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, people on the autism spectrum are often recognized for having great skills. Either because they are seen as more in touch with the spirit world, or they're recognized for their skill at, say, knowing what every plant is for. Similarly, the Navajo view a person with autism more as someone who never became an adult than as someone disordered. They talk about autism as perpetual childhood. In Senegal, some societies called autistics 'marvelous children.' Even in the United States, I've heard people talk about them being closer to God; they're honest, they seldom lie, they're more pure. I've found that belief in India as well."

Normal seems so normal until you decide to walk past it again more slowly, armed with fresh questions and perspective. Turn a common object and look at it from a new angle and you can start envisioning new possibilities.

This new AISNE monograph on diversity issues in independent schools asks the basic question: Why are so many schools struggling to evolve from predominantly white institutions into high-functioning inclusive learning communities? There has been some progress, but, as a whole, New England independent schools, as with schools across the nation, still fall short of the stated diversity goals in their missions — at least based on the numbers of students, teachers, and administrators of color, and on a survey of diversity practitioners in the schools, and on interviews with a variety of heads of school and diversity practitioners and other educators invested in this evolution.

It seems we still have Special Needs here.

This monograph is designed to augment two earlier AISNE monographs — "Hiring and Retaining Teachers of Color" and "Thriving in Independent Schools" (both available at www.aisne.org). The goal is to help schools gain greater clarity about their diversity goals — what they want and need to achieve, as well as how they can best achieve these goals.

Of course, there is no single formula that works for all schools. And, like all worthwhile pursuits, the work is not easy. As Haddon's narrator might tell us if he were advising us: It's stupid to think that schools that shift their focus to being more inclusive communities can do so without growing pains or without challenges from the broader community that has its own long history of not doing right by race.

But we hope that the information offered here will help focus the conversation in your school and lead to uncommon success. As one diversity director puts it, "We need to understand that excellence in education and diversity go hand in hand." It's not possible to have the former these days without the latter.



PART ONE

What's in a Mission Statement?

*"I do not know the course I am to run,
all is hid in mystery, but I try to do
right in everything."*

— Elizabeth Fry, 18th-century Quaker

Imagine you are attending a meeting with your board of trustees. The topic for the hour is the school's mission statement, which was revised three years ago to include language about embracing diversity and developing an inclusive program to prepare students for global citizenship. It was conceived as an extension of the original mission to educate for both knowledge and goodness — the head and heart, for individual success and engaged citizenship — as well as an effort to adjust for the changing demographics of the nation. The board members want to know how well the school is doing in meeting this new mission, particularly regarding race.

How should you respond?

If your school is like many other independent schools, your response will likely be mixed. On the one hand, you might note that the school has more students of

color than ever, closing in on 20 percent. On the other hand, you have to admit that more than a few students of color struggle academically and socially in the school. The school doesn't quite have a handle on this, but you say you are working to address it, although at the moment it's mostly a generic worry. You also have to admit that the school has not been able to attract as many teachers and administrators of color as it would like. "We're dedicated to this," you say. "But it's taking more time than we had hoped. It's just not as easy as we expected. We get very few candidates of color. The placement firms we work with tell us that all schools are looking for good candidates of color, but there aren't enough to go around. And, of those we interview, too many just don't seem like a good fit for the school. When we've offered jobs to candidates of color, about half of them turn us down in favor of another school. A couple of those we hired didn't work out."

You hesitate for a moment, then you add, "And then there's the pushback

from the community and alumni. Frankly, it's been hard. Many alumni think we're pushing what they describe as a liberal agenda, and white parents think that we're lowering academic standards. They worry about their child's college admissions while the school, as they put it, 'experiments with social change.'

There's a moment of silence as the board members take in this information. Then one trustee asks hesitantly, "What is the ultimate goal regarding diversity? Is it simply to reach a certain number of students and teachers of color? If so, is this really a worthy goal, or are we just jumping on the diversity bandwagon because it looks good in the admissions brochure? Everything else about the schools seems great — including admissions, college placement, and alumni giving. We have a great faculty and the facilities are good. Shouldn't we be happy with this and not worry so much about diversity? I mean, let's just move slowly and not beat ourselves up over this. OK?"



“Individuals no longer need to be white, male, straight, Protestant, and able-bodied; they need only to act white, male, straight, Protestant, and able-bodied.”

Some independent school educators can immediately explain to this trustee why “good enough” is not really good enough and remind the board of why the school has made this commitment, but others will likely struggle to articulate the specific values of being a diverse institution or even what the ideal diverse school looks and feels and acts like. What is the goal? How exactly do you measure it? Why isn’t good enough good enough? More simply: What matters most here? If your administrative team doesn’t yet have an agreed-upon, easily articulated answer to this trustee, perhaps the first order of business is to explore this lack of clarity. How can you commit to the diversity statement in the mission without being able to defend it or even describe it well? Shouldn’t every trustee and administrator and teacher have the language of this commitment down cold?

This scenario may not apply to your school. But interviews with numerous directors of diversity and administrators of color in independent schools in

New England suggest that, despite good intentions, there is still an uncomfortable distance between the schools’ ideal notion of themselves as well-functioning diverse learning communities and the reality of the communities. As one diversity director says about this gap, “Schools only tend to want to go so far with it. It’s easy to write a mission statement. But it’s the doing part that’s the problem [because] there’s lots of resistance. What we don’t seem to have is a unified way to work through the resistance.”

Regarding racial diversity, resistance in schools shouldn’t surprise anyone — given our nation’s long history of racism, given the racially based inequities that still tear at the brightly colored fabric of the nation, and given the fact that few of us are willing to discuss it with anything resembling openness. It’s as if most of us think that the topic of race is too incendiary. When Barack Obama delivered his “A More Perfect Union” Speech on March 18, 2008, it was one of the rare instances of a presidential candidate speaking openly about race in America. But even in this instance, it took an irresponsible media frenzy about Reverend Jeremiah Wright’s sermon excerpts to coax Obama to the podium where he told us for the first time in his long campaign that, as Cornel West put it so succinctly back in the 1980s, race matters.

In some ways, we can trace our modern-day nervousness in schools back to that landmark Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. We tend to praise that decision for ending legal segregation, but, at the time, it was not exactly received with jubilation. As Frank Wu, author of *Yellow* and professor of law at Wayne State University, puts it in a piece entitled “Brown at 50: Keeping the Promises,” “We prefer to forget the controversy that ensued

[after the Brown decision]. Government officials from high school principals and local education boards, to governors and United States senators began an open campaign of ‘mass resistance.’ White leaders called for expelling Blacks in colonization schemes. They warned that integration would mean rape. Ordinary White citizens formed mobs to prevent Black children from attending class. The North was no better than the South.”

Although we know better — or should know better — the whole brutal history of race and racism in the world and in America still plays havoc with our hearts and minds. Whites, researchers point out, have also been so good at repressing this history that most don’t have anything resembling a clear sense of their own relationship to race, past or present.

Diversity in schools obviously runs deeper than race. Gender, class, culture, nationality, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, and learning abilities and styles are all important when considering what makes for a healthy school community. In general, understanding otherness (and one’s otherness to those others) and coming to see the great value in the diversity of perspectives that everyone brings to the table — as well as the deep moral value in treating all comers as equals — is the *über* goal for schools. But this monograph is focused primarily on race because, as one head of school puts it, “Race drives the diversity dialogue.” The goal here is to help all precollegiate educators in their efforts to move their schools closer to their ideal vision of an inclusive community.

The monograph also looks closely at the questions of white identity and privilege and how understanding both can help schools with their overall diversity goals. Over and over, diversity directors say that this work is important, arguing that white educators, because of their

dominant position in schools, need, on the one hand, to take a leading role in diversity work, and, on the other hand, to understand how white culture has contributed to the problem. As one association executive puts it, “Understanding whiteness and white privilege” is the “*sine qua non* for getting to real inclusion.”

Has there been significant movement in schools? Yes. Are we there yet? Nope.

In his book *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights*, Kenji Yoshino — a graduate of Phillips Exeter Academy, Harvard University, and Yale Law School, and now the Chief Justice Earl Warren Professor of Constitutional Law at New York University — outlines the specific challenges of being different in the culture today. On the one hand, he notes the advances we have made in all areas of diversity. There are more women in the workplace, more students of color in Ivy League schools, more openly gay people in all walks of life. But there are also limits to how much one can be oneself. As Yoshino puts it, speaking of the faculty at Harvard but connecting it to educational institutions in general, “Individuals no longer need to be white, male, straight, Protestant, and able-bodied; they need only to act white, male, straight, Protestant, and able-bodied.” Later, he sums it up this way: “Outsiders are included, but only if we behave like insiders — that is, only if we cover.”

This concept of “covering” — of suppressing an essential part of our being in order to fit in and get along with those in the majority — speaks directly to the concerns of many diversity practitioners in independent schools, who say that while schools might look mildly different than they did twenty years ago, they are still a few strides short of acting different. It’s as if schools say, “Welcome to our school. We honor diversity, but you need to act like us.”

“This covering demand,” Yoshino concludes, “is the civil rights issue of our time.... If we believe a commitment against racism is about equal respect for all races, we are not fulfilling that commitment if we protect only racial minorities who conform to historically white norms.”

If a school says that its ideal image is as a diverse learning community, then, in order to achieve this ideal, it needs to talk about it openly and thoughtfully. It first needs great clarity on what it means by “a diverse learning community” — what such a community looks like, feels like, acts like, and why it’s worth pursuing, even against some community resistance. Then it needs to lay the groundwork that will allow the school to intentionally evolve from the community it has been for so long into the community it says it wants to be. It needs to establish the indices of an inclusive school community, and explore the varied reasons for not measuring up to the ideal.

But it’s also important for schools to undertake this self-examination in the proper spirit. The trustee is right; schools don’t need to beat themselves up over this. Nationally, independent schools have made some progress over the years from predominantly white institutions to more inclusive ones. In the 1997–1998 school year, 17.3 percent of students in NAIS-member schools were students of color. By 2007–2008, the number reached 21.9 percent. In the same time period, the teachers of color nationally climbed from 9.2 percent to 12.3 percent. In New England, the numbers are more modest all around, though they still show an increase over the ten-year period. Many schools, as noted, have added diversity clauses to their mission statements and have hired diversity directors or coordinators to help guide the process. The National

Association of Independent Schools offers an annual People of Color Conference to support the work of educators of color. The Association of Independent Schools of New England runs its own diversity conference and workshops, and offers conferences for middle and high school students of color. A number of other organizations and individual schools also offer workshops and conferences focused on improving diversity in schools. Many educators belong to a People of Color in Independent School (POCIS) group or a Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED) group as a means of mutual support in their work.

But there are still issues — most of which have to do with school culture and climate — that make life difficult for students and teachers of color, and that account for the gap between the ideal and the real.

A belief in the value of open inquiry requires that a school that professes a deep belief in developing a well-functioning inclusive community stare the diversity question square in the eye and demand answers. Is it really as important as we profess in our mission statements, or is it more of a marketing ploy? Is it OK to have a decent number of students of color, but not many faculty of color? Is it OK that the curriculum is still tightly linked to Western Civilization? Are any of our traditions getting in the way of the needed change? Shouldn’t we get a better handle on the experiences of students of color? What do teachers need to know in order to teach a diverse group well? And, if we’re going to talk about diversity, shouldn’t we also be willing to talk about white identity and the degree to which the culture of the majority informs much of what we do? In short, how do we answer the trustee who asks, “If all else seems good about the school, can’t you just let the diversity thing evolve over time, as it will?”



PART TWO

Starting the Dialogue

“If the house is to be set in order, one cannot begin with the present; he [or she] must begin with the past.” — John Hope Franklin

Let’s start with the obvious. The only way to sustain dialogue on diversity in schools is to establish absolute clarity on why the work is worth the effort, and then make sure everyone in the school is involved. The board of trustees must be firmly behind diversity initiatives — put its commitment in writing in the school’s mission statement and then help shepherd the school in its evolution into the sort of inclusive school it envisions. As one head of school puts it, this work should also be part of everyone’s job description, and everyone from the head on down should be evaluated on how well he or she is doing in supporting and encouraging inclusivity.

But where does the clarity of vision come from?

There are numerous ways to answer this.¹ For one, there is the clear business motive. The nation’s diversity is increasing every year. By midcentury, white people will likely no longer be in the majority. As Peter Braverman and Scott Looney put it in an article for *Independent School*, demography is destiny. “Schools [that] take assertive positive action to attract and retain a wider array of students and families will find the marketplace of the early twenty-first century more hospitable.” In order to make a school highly attractive to a diverse group of families, of course, a school needs a diverse faculty skilled in running multicultural classrooms, a diverse administration skilled in developing and managing an inclusive environment, a percentage of students of

color that closely matches the region’s demographics, and families of all races who feel comfortable on campus and speak favorably of the school’s culture and climate.

Most schools that have embraced diversity also zero in on the ethical question of what is right. If the goal of the U.S. is to be a well-functioning pluralistic society, then the goal of schools should be to prepare students to be well-functioning members of that pluralistic society. If we want a percentage of our students to be future leaders of this society, we need them to live and learn in diverse environments and understand from experience the value of cross-cultural dialogue. We don’t just want to expose the majority white students to some students of color so that the white students will be more comfortable in the world when they graduate. We want students of color and white students to be leaders in the school and, eventually, in the nation and world. Schools need to believe that the cross-fertilization of ideas

¹ See “The AISNE Guide to Hiring and Retaining Teachers of Color,” available at www.aisne.org. It includes an overview on the practical and moral reasons for schools to make the shift from predominantly white schools to inclusive learning communities with both student and adult populations that mirror the larger community.

makes for, as one teacher puts it, “the maximum opportunity for learning.” “We want our students to be engaged in their communities and help move this democracy towards its ideal,” says a diversity director. “They can’t do this in a monoculture. They need a diverse school community and a multicultural curriculum.” As another diversity director notes, when schools open up discussion on what a world-class education looks like today, “they will inevitably conclude that it includes diversity.”

The bottom line: For a variety of reasons, you can’t call your school an excellent school unless you embrace diversity and put in a concerted effort to ensure a well-functioning inclusive community. This is not to say that there aren’t other important factors in excellent schools; it simply means you can’t ignore diversity these days and be a top-notch school.

This new model for a quality independent school — being an attractive option to a diverse group of students and their families, while focusing on educating all students to live and work in a multicultural world — has begun to emerge in every region of the country. But the process has been what one educator described as a “slow awakening” — beginning in the 1960s, in parallel to the Civil Rights Movement, and gaining momentum ever since. Yet it wasn’t until the turn of this new century that independent schools reached something close to a consensus on the importance of this work, even as schools continue to wrestle to get it right.

Seeing History

The imperative for diversity is driven, in part, by the clear moral argument embedded in our Constitution and other founding documents for equity and justice in society and in tenets that underlie every religion. But as we start down the path of this new century, there seems to be an increasing restless-

ness to get it right now. In other words, schools are looking not only at the historical inequities in the United States, but also at the continuing inequities, and are saying clearly that they don’t want to be part of it anymore.

Although the racial brutality exhibited in the founding of our nation and in the political and cultural systems of inequity leading up to recent times — that is, in all the years of our nation’s existence — is not accurately highlighted in most textbooks, educated Americans know the problem well enough. The United States was not so much discovered as conquered. When Columbus landed in the Bahamas, the Arawak people couldn’t have been more open and gracious. Columbus repaid this generosity by enslaving many of the natives (here and elsewhere), taking their land, destroying their culture, and working many of them to death in the pursuit of gold. When the colonists started to “settle” the mainland, they offered the Native Americans, among other things, a handshake and blankets riddled with small pox. Then they kicked the remaining Native Americans off their land.

The racism was most obviously exhibited with the use of slaves in the colonies, a practice that continued even with the establishment of the United States as an independent democracy. All the work in Philadelphia on the U.S. Constitution couldn’t quite measure up to the egalitarian ideal of a true democracy. Right from the start, blacks were considered lesser than whites (in the bizarre language of political compromise, one black person counted as three-fifths of a person). “If one had to identify a single theme in the discussions leading up to the Constitution,” Judge A. Leon Higginbotham said, “it was that slaves should be viewed as property, as subhuman.”



Schools need to believe that the cross-fertilization of ideas makes for “the maximum opportunity for learning.”

Tim Wise, author of *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*, writes that “the history of this nation for folks of color was, for generations, nothing less than an inter-generational hate crime, one in which 9/11s were woven into the fabric of everyday life: hundreds of thousands of the enslaved who died from the conditions of their bondage; thousands more who were lynched (as many as 10,000 in the first few years after the Civil War, according to testimony in the *Congressional Record* at the time); millions of indigenous persons wiped off the face of the Earth.”

Although the Civil War ended the official practice of slavery, “freed” black people were brutalized for another 100 years with Jim Crow segregation laws. Looking back on the worst days of post-emancipation discrimination in the 1890s, historian Lerone Bennett describes the shackled spirit of African Americans from years of cultural and systemic brutality:



Our official take
on race and class is
“a blind spot as
large as any hole
in the ozone.”

To work from sunup to sundown for a whole year and to end up owing “the man” for the privilege of working; to do this year after year and to sink deeper and deeper into debt; to be chained to the land by violence and bills at the plantation store; to be conditioned by dirt and fear and shame and signs; to become a part of these signs and to feel them in the deepest recess of the spirit; to be powerless and to curse one’s self for cowardice; to be knocked down in the streets for failing to call a shiftless hillbilly “mister”; to be a plaything of judges and courts and policemen; to be black in a white fire and to believe finally in one’s own unworthiness; to be without books and words and pretty pictures; without newspapers and radios; to be without

understanding, without the rationalizations of psychology and sociology, without Freud and E. Franklin Frazier and Jet; to give in finally; to bow, to scrape, to grin; and to hate one’s self for one’s servility and weakness and blackness — all this was a Kafkaesque nightmare that continued for days and nights and years.

Discrimination in this nation, of course, was not just reserved for African Americans. At various times, our history includes the abuse of Chinese immigrants, the expulsion of Mexican Americans, and the internment of Japanese Americans. Even particular European Americans were at times victims of intense discrimination until they managed to find their way into the white fold. In short, just about every minority group was, at some point, subject to repression and abuse by the majority.

Restrictive covenants, developed in the 1890s in California and approved by the Supreme Court in 1926, allowed for nearly a half-century of officially sanctioned racial discrimination in housing. Schools were also legally segregated by race for decades.

The Post-Civil Rights Era

In many ways, it’s difficult for the average white person to grasp the continuing racial discrimination in our nation. It’s not highlighted in schools. It’s rarely mentioned in mainstream media except in times of crisis. If you live in a predominantly white neighborhood, in fact, it’s pretty easy to think that we’ve finally reached an era of equity in which each and every one of us can be measured by his or her own merits. But statistical evidence tells us otherwise.

“The United States,” writes Adam Howard, professor of education at Colby College and author of *Learning Privilege: Lessons of Power and Identity in Affluent Schooling*, “is the most highly stratified society in the industrialized world.” It’s sad enough to have such stratification in a democracy; sadder still when it is closely aligned with race.

To many Americans, this may seem like an exaggeration, or some sort of manipulation of the truth. Our official line is that ours is the wealthiest nation in the world, and that our democracy is functioning as well as any democracy can function. America is great. America is the land of opportunity. America is a model for the rest of the world. And so on.

But, despite any virtues one might attribute to this nation, America is also a nation in which more than 30 million people currently live in poverty. America is a place where the top 1 percent now has more wealth than the entire bottom 95 percent. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the share of income of the poorest one-fifth of U.S. households dropped in this decade from 4.2 percent to 3.5 percent. In other words, the gap is widening.

According to a *New York Times* poll, 75 percent of Americans believe that their chances of moving up from one social class to another has risen in recent years, when, in fact, social class has played a greater, not lesser, role in “shaping everyday realities of Americans.” Michael Holzman, researcher for the Schott Foundation for Public Education, notes that “more than half — 53 percent — of African-American males did not receive diplomas with their cohort in 2005–06 school year.” The U.S. Census Bureau also informs us that African Americans are twice as likely to be unemployed as white Americans, and that “African Americans and Latinos

have the lowest homeownership rates in the nation — under 50 percent, compared to 76 percent for whites.”

According to the Survey of Consumer Finances, in 2004 the median net worth of African-American families was \$20,400 and \$27,100 for Latino families, as compared with \$140,700 for white families. Put another way, white families, on average, have a net worth that is almost seven times that of African-American families — a 700 percent difference. It also reports on U.S. Census data that tells us that the 2005 median income was \$30,858 for African Americans and \$35,967 for Latinos, while for white Americans it was \$50,784. In addition, we know that the recent subprime loan crisis has had the greatest impact on African-American and Latino communities. As Delvin Davis points out in *Poverty and Race*, discrimination in the home loan industry is for real today. “Data from the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) indicate that African Americans are three times as likely as whites to receive a subprime loan, and four times as likely to refinance from a subprime loan.... Even when controlling for factors of creditworthiness, both African Americans and Latinos are more likely to have a higher rate loan with prepayment penalties than white borrowers.” Consequently, they are more likely to default on their loan and lose their homes. Davis underscores this grim news, noting, “Without a healthy, fair, and affordable mortgage market, the gains of homeownership for people of color will drain away through foreclosure and equity-stripping.”

These are basic equity issues, and it’s hard to read these facts without acknowledging how much needs to change if America wants to come close to living up to its democratic principles. And, yet, you have to search out this

sort of information. You have to remind people — especially those who argue that the playing field is now level — that large-scale discrimination is not yet a thing of the past.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this discrimination is that it’s not front and center in the media. Garret Keizer writes in *Harper’s* about his frustrations with the way we seem to deliberately (and perhaps unconsciously) suppress race and class issues. What sets him off, he says, is how quickly we’ve turned our collective attention to global warming. Not that global warming isn’t worth addressing, but Keizer feels we should express similar urgency about the class and racial divides in this country. “I am also aware, thanks to book after book by Jonathan Kozol,” he writes, “that children are drowning in our inner-city schools and have been drowning there year after year and decade after decade, but I do not recall anything like the universal lament that has met the drowning scene in *An Inconvenient Truth*.” As he puts it, our official take on race and class is “a blind spot as large as any hole in the ozone.”

As it turns out, many educators agree with Keizer — which accounts for the diversity statements in many schools. The concern now, however, is making inclusive schools a reality in a culture that appears to be, at best, fuzzy on the issue, and, at worst, hostile to the idea that schools need to act in an equitable and just manner.

In voicing his dissent in the pivotal *University of California Regents v. Bakke* decision (in which the Supreme Court ruled against affirmative action quotas in college admissions, while still allowing that race can be a factor as long as it was not the sole factor), Justice Thurgood Marshall wrote, “In light of the sorry history of discrimination and its devastating impact on the lives of



The quest for diversity
“is too important
to be left to chance,
to assume that it
will just happen
because everyone
is well-intentioned.”

Negroes, bringing the Negro into the mainstream of American life should be a state interest of the highest order. To fail to do so is to ensure that America will forever remain a divided society.”

But racial equality has not been a state interest of the highest order, or a national interest of the highest order. Since the late 1960s, there seems to have been a concerted effort *not* to talk about it, or, if we talk about it, to gloss over it and move on to other seemingly more pressing topics. Of course, there are many people who have dedicated their lives to righting this injustice, but the mainstream culture (read “white culture”) seems to treat it mainly as a distraction. To their credit, schools have pressed the issue. But the weirdness in the culture can’t help but impact the efforts in schools, all of which means that schools need to be far more deliberate in how they proceed.

Beverly Daniel Tatum, president of Spellman College, addresses this general discomfort in her book *Can*



“Can we get beyond our fear, our sweaty palms, our anxiety about saying the wrong things or using the wrong words, and have an honest conversation about racial issues?”

We Talk About Race? For one thing, she notes, we live “in a unique moment of legal history in which the notion of considering race (talking about race) in school admissions is being challenged at the K–12 level as well as in higher education.” But she is also concerned that we have trouble even knowing how to talk about race in a constructive way. “Can we get beyond our fear, our sweaty palms, our anxiety about saying the wrong things or using the wrong words,” she writes, “and have an honest conversation about racial issues?”

The answer, of course, is yes. But it takes concerted effort. “It’s never going to be easy,” says one diversity director. “It’s never all *kumbaya*. There’s always going to be resistance and pushback. And you’re going to make mistakes and feelings are going to get hurt. But if you set up the process right, you can make significant progress.”

In *School Leadership for the Future*, Thomas Hoerr, head of New City School in St. Louis, Missouri, argues that, when it comes to diversity, a little cultural dissonance is a good thing. It represents the necessary tension needed to shift a school’s culture from a place where students and faculty of color feel like guests in the school to a place where a multicultural norm dominates. Hoerr points to an interesting study by the Friends Council of Education, “Embracing the Tension,” in which schools with the least amount of diversity reported the highest level of tolerance. This unexpected finding suggests a certain degree of self-satisfaction. But the schools that reported greater tension were also schools with greater diversity. The tension, he notes, is a clear sign of cultural shifting toward something better and stronger. But it takes work. “Any advance takes times and energy and extracts a cost, and the quest for diversity is no different,” Hoerr writes. He then goes on to describe the tenacity needed to move through this process. In a nutshell, Hoerr argues, “This issue is too important to be left to chance, to assume that it will just happen because everyone is well-intentioned. School leaders need to take the lead in the making their schools places in which all kinds of people can thrive.”



PART THREE

The Work of White Educators

“The right to search for truth implies also a duty; one must not conceal any part of what one has recognized to be true.” — Albert Einstein

One point of unanimous agreement among diversity practitioners is that schools with predominantly white administrations and faculty can’t evolve into truly inclusive communities without the significant involvement of white folks. As one head of school puts it, “This is white people’s work — at least at the beginning stages. And by ‘beginning stages’ I mean at least the first decade.”

One of the ironies of diversity work in independent schools is that many schools that make the decision to evolve into inclusive communities often begin by hiring a person of color as the diversity director or coordinator and then expect that person to come into a predominantly white community — in some cases as the first faculty member of color — and be the agent of change. A diversity director who has been doing

this work for years and has seen a lot of young people of color crash and burn against the pillars of tradition, says that schools that “expect a young person of color to enter a new school and lead the change are not only expecting the impossible, they are setting these folks up for failure.” Hiring a person of color who has experience directing diversity work makes perfect sense. But the problem comes when the majority white community — board members, administrators, teachers, parents, and students — stay on the sidelines or offer only minimal help.

What would diversity practitioners like white educators to do? In a nutshell, *get involved*. In the ideal school community, they say, the board is involved, the head of school is involved, midlevel administrators are involved, teachers are involved, parents are involved, and students are involved. On the one hand, this work requires that white educators be allies to adults and students of color in schools — supporting them in myriad ways. On the other hand, it also requires

white educators to explore their own racial and cultural identities — educate themselves about both what it means to be white in America today and how racism has shaped so much of our history and culture (including our system of both public and private schools). The latter work is, in effect, an extension of being an ally to educators of color because it demonstrates a commitment to an open and honest exploration of race within the community and the larger culture. As one diversity director notes, “We have only gotten so far with the idea of diversity equaling tolerance for people who are different from ourselves. But this is only the very least we can do.” What’s the most we can do? “Focus on a significant cultural shift. Right now we tend to ask the people of color to do all the shifting. It’s absolutely necessary that white people explore the ways in which ‘being white’ means something.”

But, of course, in order for this to happen, the predominantly white community has to be clear about why such work is important. And, in order



“This is white people’s work — at least at the beginning stages. And by ‘beginning stages’ I mean at least the first decade.”

to do this, it needs to work through the almost inevitable resistance to and discomfort with discussing two central topics in diversity work: white identity and privilege.

White Identity and Privilege

“The problems of racism have generally focused on those affected by racism,” writes Elaine Manglitz, professor of education at the University of Georgia, “instead of those who benefit from it, and the complex issues around the maintenance of white identity, power, and privilege [are] not usually examined.” A group of New England diversity practitioners, offering their shared wishes about what schools should do, was very clear: this work is paramount.

Why is the topic of white identity and privilege an awkward one among many whites, including white educators? The literature on white privilege notes that white reluctance to talk about race is so widespread because it has been culturally instilled in whites not to talk

about race. Until recently, it was not a subject brought up in most predominantly white schools or churches or communities. As Shelly Tochluk puts it in her book, *Witnessing Whiteness*, “Our resistance arises, in part, because individually we avoid behavior historically considered racist.” The result is that many whites have worked hard to disassociate themselves from historical causes of racial inequity and to see themselves as good, race-neutral individuals who work hard to be respectful of all people. In schools, this logic translates into a desire among white educators to help every child who enters the school achieve at his or her highest level, but with little consideration for race or recognition of their own race, and with little understanding of the nation’s racist underpinnings or consideration for the ways the dominant white culture of a school makes life difficult for adults and students of color.

The central problem with this “treat everyone the same” logic is that race relationships are so complicated — after hundreds of years of discrimination — that it takes more than good intentions to make school work for all children and teachers. In other words, race *does* impact every element of school life to one degree or another — touching everything from curriculum to hiring practices, to student achievement and retention, to school culture and climate, to deeply held values.

Another problem with this logic in schools is that white educators who grew up in a majority white community, attended a majority white school and college, and now teach in a majority white independent school are not likely to understand the experiences of students of color in school without developing a fairly sophisticated understanding of race dynamics in America — how they came about and

how they affect all of us still. And that can’t happen without talking about what it means to be white, as part of an open discussion of *all* dimensions of race in America. A conscious effort is absolutely necessary here, argues Adam Howard in *Learning Privilege: Lessons of Power and Identity in Affluent Schooling*. “[The] extensive body of literature has documented the various ways that schools reflect the social class [and race] divisions of the larger society fairly consistently through their structures, practices, and policies and the lived experiences of, and the interactions among, those within schools.”

In *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*, Frances E. Kendall, a consultant who specializes in social justice issues, addresses the white culture this way: “If we don’t fully understand our individual and collective roles in maintaining a system of white superiority, our relationship with people of color remains superficial, our ability to function in diverse workplaces is greatly diminished, and we fail to create a just world in which everyone has an equitable opportunity to contribute and thrive.”

In her 2004 *Independent School* article “White on White: Exploring White Racial Identity, Privilege, and Racism,” Elizabeth Denevi, co-director of diversity at Georgetown Day School in Washington, D.C., distills the importance of the work. “Independent schools committed to the development of a multicultural community,” she writes, “find they can’t progress without confronting the question of white racial identity and privilege.”

In short, if it means something to be African American or Latino or Asian American or Native American, then it surely means something to be European American. If we want real racial equity,

we need to look at race honestly from all perspectives — including the perspective of whiteness. The fact that the conversation may be difficult for white educators, especially those considering the topic for the first time, should not discourage schools from pushing ahead with a sense of urgency. “If you don’t see yourself as part of the diversity of the school, you’ll get stuck on this notion of otherness,” says a diversity director who has worked with a variety of schools as a diversity consultant, “and this will impede the school’s ability to move toward its goal.”

Addressing the problem of sexism in an essay titled “Our House Is on Fire,” sociologist Allan G. Johnson also manages to encapsulate the trouble many of us have talking about race, in general, and white privilege in particular. “Millions of women are weary from the struggle simply to hang onto what’s been gained,” he writes, “and many well-intentioned men do nothing because they can’t see how to acknowledge what’s going on without inviting guilt and blame simply for being male. The result is a knotted tangle of fear, anger, blame, defensiveness, guilt, pain, denial, ambivalence, and confusion. The more we pull at it, the tighter it gets.”

Johnson, however, goes on to say that we *can* unravel the knot of privilege. It begins with “getting clear about what privilege really is, about what it’s got to do with each of us, and about how everyone can see themselves as part of the process of change toward something better.”

And what exactly is privilege? Johnson’s take, echoing many others, is that “privilege is a social advantage that is both unearned and comes to people simply because they happen to belong to a particular social category. As such,

privilege differs from other kinds of advantage in being exclusive, unearned, and socially conferred.”

This is exactly what Peggy McIntosh identified in her seminal essay, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” which first appeared in 1989 in *Peace and Freedom*, and was reprinted in *Independent School* in the Winter of 1990 and used in countless college courses and by schoolteachers and administrators across the nation. It’s interesting to read it 20 years later and see how well the argument holds up.

McIntosh, like Johnson, comes at the topic from the perspective of one who had studied male privilege. Her epiphany is a simple one. “Through work to bring materials from women’s studies to the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men’s unwillingness to grant that they are overprivileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged.” Such denials, McIntosh notes, “protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened, or ended.” It doesn’t take much of a leap of logic to see how this applies to race. As long as white people deny their own privilege — even while acknowledge the disadvantages of being African American or Latino or Asian or Native American in the U.S. today — they are acting in a way that protects the advantages they have.

Perhaps the most notable comment in McIntosh’s article is her clear understanding of the value of exploring white privilege. “Describing white privilege,” she writes, “makes one newly accountable.” In her list of 26 forms of privilege, she notes a number of which highlight the ease of moving through this world as a white person — finding an apartment or house in a neighborhood one likes, obtaining bank loans with relative ease, shopping without worry, expecting police to treat one with respect, obtain-



“If you don’t see yourself as part of the diversity of the school, you’ll get stuck on this notion of otherness, and this will impede the school’s ability to move toward its goal.”

ing jobs with affirmative action employers without having coworkers on the job suspect one got it because of race, and, yes, finding good schools where one is guaranteed to find teachers of one’s own culture.

Specifically, McIntosh asks us “to distinguish between earned strength and unearned conferred power” based on some form of social privilege. All educators have their “earned strength” based on their hard work and years of experience in the field. But many also have some degree of “unearned power.” Finally, she asks us to distinguish between individual acts of oppression and “invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance.”

This latter point is important for schools. Individual teachers, as noted earlier, may be open and generous and supportive of all races, and yet still be connected to, and benefit from, a system that offers clear advantages to whites. Perhaps most difficult to understand and accept is that, by being



“Whites generally aren’t willing to shift, but they expect people of color to do so. That’s privilege in a nutshell.”

part of this system, one is likely to hold more than a few unexamined racial attitudes that have been culturally instilled.

In *Can We Talk About Race?*, Beverly Daniel Tatum describes the process of opening up dialogue on race in simple terms: “connect the dots.” In other words, we need to “help [policymakers and educators] see how unexamined racial attitudes can negatively impact student performance and how a willingness to break the silence about the impact of race in schools as part of a program of antiracist professional development can improve achievement.” In other words, schools can’t reach their diversity goals unless they are willing to address what feminist scholar Susan Griffin calls “the unnatural weight of unspoken truth.”

Connecting the dots, Tatum writes, means examining “notions of race and intelligence in America’s classrooms, the academic achievement

of underperforming students of color, and the benefit of antiracist professional development.” She describes this process as a matter of *affirming* identity, *building* community, and *cultivating* leadership — the ABC’s of developing inclusive schools.

Directing Diversity

Early in 2008, the Association of Independent School New England (AISNE) provided directors and coordinators of diversity from around the region an opportunity to discuss common issues in their work. In support of school multicultural education efforts, the professionals gathered that day decided to issue a statement defining the most effective framework for transforming learning around issues of diversity. Here are their views on the diversity director’s role:

Schools must establish the necessary framework of support for directors and coordinators of diversity to succeed. These professionals must not operate in a vacuum or in isolation. This framework must include:

- a clear job description of a full-time position as a top-level school administrator with responsibilities focused on diversity and multicultural education .
- a clearly defined listing of the necessary professional credentials and experience in diversity and multicultural education to be used in a candidate search for the director/coordinator of diversity position.
- directors/coordinators of diversity as part of the upper management team, reporting directly to the head of school, and regularly addressing the school’s board of trustees.
- a diversity leadership team, comprising other teachers and administrators from throughout the school, that supports the ongoing work of directors/coordinators of diversity.
- having diversity professionals directly involved in teacher hiring and evaluation.
- the necessary financial resources to support curriculum redesign for student multicultural competency development.
- the necessary financial resources to support the ongoing professional development for all school personnel around diversity and multicultural education.

Addressing White Privilege and Identity

Although individuals within schools have been talking about white privilege for some time now, few independent schools have addressed the topic in a formal way. What follows is advice from a number of diversity practitioners, school administrators, and those who have written on this topic.

Start with the personal

If you attend conferences on diversity, you realize that working for equity and justice on a societal scale also requires a great deal of self-examination. “This is inside-out work,” one diversity director says. “We have to start with ourselves, understand the ways in which each of us is a racialized being. Only then can we begin to shift a school’s culture and practices.” In fact, she argues, if schools would spend most of their time on personal responses to race, they will evolve more quickly than schools that focus too much on surface matters. In *Understanding White Privilege*, Frances Kendall adds to this notion, specifically about white identity and privilege. “Through that personal work,” she writes, “we become clearer about the necessity of changing our institutions, and we work to build a greater repertoire of skills to make the needed changes.”

But it’s also important to keep the goal of this work front and center. This is not about making white people feel bad about themselves. It’s about building an inclusive school that benefits all members of the community. Mica Pollock, professor of education at Harvard University, offers similar thoughts in *Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real About Race in School* — a collection of essays that Pollock edited. The driving question behind discussions of race and white privilege is not, “Am I a bad person?” Rather, educators should ask themselves, “Do my everyday acts help promote a more equitable society?”

The problem of getting lost in guilt or blame is that it offers no solution to the issues of racial inequities. White educators need to dig for the truth and bring it out into the light.

Offer in-service workshops

Assuming all other steps are in place — diversity in mission statement, a board and head of school that have done their work and are committed to change, a diversity strategic plan, etc. — schools have introduced the topic of white privilege and identity in a variety of ways. One approach is to show films such as *The Color of Fear* or *Mirrors of Privilege: Making Whiteness Visible* to the entire faculty, and moderate follow-up discussion groups (the latter film — produced by the World Trust, a nonprofit organization focused on peace and equity — comes with a discussion guide, available at www.world-trust.org). Schools have also invited speakers to address the faculty on the topic. In high demand is Tim Wise, author of *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*. He has spoken at AISNE diversity workshops and has worked with numerous schools and universities, including the Duke Medical School. One school that took part in a regional workshop with Tim Wise followed up with its own faculty discussions on white identity and privilege (moderated by two experienced diversity directors), including a fishbowl exercise that allowed the teachers of color to talk directly to white teachers and vice-versa. “The conversations were painful,” says the head of school, “but it helped jumpstart a process that continues today, which has been good for the community.” An outcome of this one-day event was the formation of a white affinity group that continued to look at the question of white identity and privilege in the school and, more generally, racial identity development.

In another independent school, a group of white educators read *White Like Me* and discussed it in a series of meetings, considering how the issues raised in the book play out in the school community,




The driving question behind discussions of race and white privilege is not, “Am I a bad person?” Rather, educators should ask themselves, “Do my everyday acts help promote a more equitable society?”

and how they affected their individual teaching. One white English teacher noted that not all participants stayed with the process, but that, for him, it was both sobering and of great value. “Now I’m far more conscious of my own privilege and of the dominance of white culture in the school. I won’t pretend it wasn’t emotionally hard for me, but the result is that I’m always thinking about racial balance in the curriculum and the needs of students of color.”

Try adopting the Platinum Rule

Frances Kendall encourages educators to reshape the Golden Rule (“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”) into what she describes as the Platinum Rule of Diversity: “Do unto others as they would like to be done unto.” In other words, treat other people as they would like to be treated, not necessarily as you would like to be treated. This seemingly subtle shift requires, among other things, that white educators listen attentively to people of color and then act in a supportive way. The process



“Our ability to notice systemic, institutional racism expands with our consciousness regarding unintended individual racism.”

has the added benefit of breaking classic patterns in school. After years of working on issues of white privilege, Peggy McIntosh admitted in a conference session that even she still had a tendency to unconsciously value her own perspective and views over those of colleagues of color — to take charge of discussions, to proffer solutions, etc. — until she was called out on it. She describes it as a matter of unconsciously buying into the notion of one’s own superiority, or of an institution’s greatness.

From a survey of New England diversity directors and coordinators came this advice: “Listen to people of color.”

Focus on cultural shifting

“Let’s face it,” says a Latino teacher, “the values of a school reflect the culture of the majority. To have it any other way requires some deep reflection and commitment to change.” Like other educators of color, she is talking mostly about the way educators

of color need to adjust to the culture of schools — what is often described as making a cultural shift. As a director of diversity puts it, “Whites generally aren’t willing to shift, but they expect people of color to do so. That’s privilege in a nutshell.”

What schools need to do, she continues, echoing the work of Kenji Yoshino, “is challenge the idea that success means assimilation” — as if the goal of people of color in independent schools is to be more like white people. Rather, “white people need to get in the trenches” — get to know their colleagues of color well, get to know their students of color well, get to know the parents of color well, learn how to work with a diverse faculty and teach a diverse group of kids. In a truly multicultural community, everyone is making some sort of shift to adjust to a shared multicultural climate.

This work starts with the institutional belief that all students and adults will benefit from living and working in a multicultural school environment — that diversity and excellence are inextricably linked.

Required reading

As institutions that value reading, schools can approach the topic through required summer reading or ongoing reading groups focused on white privilege and identity. There are many excellent books on the topic. Here’s a short list:

- *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*, Tim Wise
- *Learning Privilege: Lessons of Power and Identity in Affluent Schooling*, Adam Howard
- *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*, Frances Kendall

- *Witnessing Whiteness: First Steps Toward an Antiracist Practice and Culture*, Shelly Tochluk
- *Can We Talk About Race? And Other Conversations in an Era of School Resegregation*, Beverly Daniel Tatum
- *Why Are All of the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race*, Beverly Daniel Tatum
- *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights*, Kenji Yoshino
- *Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real About Race in School*, edited by Mica Pollock
- “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” Peggy McIntosh
- *We Can’t Teach What We Don’t Know: White Teachers, Multicultural Schools*, Gary Howard
- *Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, Lisa Delpit
- *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*, Paul Kivel

Attend diversity conferences

The topic of white privilege has been addressed at a number of AISNE diversity conferences and workshops. There is also the national White Privilege Conference run by the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (www.uccs.edu/~wpc/), which offers a wide array of sessions on the topic annually, looking at both the collegiate and precollegiate levels. In addition, there are a number of national diversity conferences for independent school educators that also address white privilege, including the Independent School Diversity Seminar (www.diversitydirections.com).

Schools can also offer professional development funds for summertime study of white identity and privilege. When teachers and administrators take the initiative, they are more likely to return as committed and knowledgeable change agents.

What Is a White Ally? Educators of Color Respond

There are many white educators in independent schools already involved in diversity work, and who are ready and willing to talk about white privilege. They see themselves, in part, as white allies whose job it is to help forward the diversity work of a school and, in particular, support the work of their colleagues of color. White allies, ironically because of white privilege, can say things that teachers of color often can't. As Michael Eric Dyson, author and professor of sociology at Georgetown University, says of Tim Wise, "He's a white boy, you know; he can say things I can't."

What do educators of color want from white allies? The following are responses to a survey of educators of color (edited for consistency of style).

White allies listen and empathize.

- Most importantly, white allies listen.
- They show empathy, not sympathy. They speak *with*, not

for, people of color. They also recognize the limits of their ability to empathize.

- They realize that white privilege undermines the social stability and psychological health of folks of color. They say: "As a person of privilege, how can I support you?"; "What can I do to make your experience here similar to my own?"; "How can I be another voice for you?"; and "I want to support you in any way I can."

White allies are committed to — and take responsibility for — their own learning. They don't expect people of color to educate them.

- They are characterized by being supportive, nondismissive, and willing to learn, while honestly and humbly admitting what they don't understand.
- They behave with not only a sense of respect for all, but a willingness to learn about those who differ in background, culture, language, experience, skin tone, etc.

- They can be identified by their desire to be appreciative of the cultural richness that others present, displaying courage by addressing sensitive/controversial issues, not being "yes" women/men, asking questions, and making an honest effort to build relationships with people of color.
- They acknowledge perspectives different from their own and adapt their language to incorporate varying vantage points.

White allies neither dismiss nor minimize the negative experiences of people of color in independent schools.

- They do not dismiss the concerns of people of color or the potential for situations to have racial overtones. They don't downplay people of color's harsh realities in white school systems.
- They do *not* do or say anything to silence people who are bringing up issues and/or proposals.

continued on next page

Establish a white affinity group

Schools have long understood the value of developing affinity groups for teachers and students of color. If schools offer the opportunity for white educators, too, they will likely find at least a core group of white educators willing to work together on exploring white identity and privilege and how it plays out in the school community. Engaged white educators will make a huge difference in a school's evolution. Schools only need to help offer the opportunity for engagement. (See sidebar on white allies.)

Fund a lecture series on diversity issues

As long as inequities exist in the culture, we'll have a great deal to talk about. If you offer an ongoing diversity lecture series and include at least one writer or expert annually who focuses on white privilege and identity, the school community will start to develop a solid knowledge base and, ultimately, feel more comfortable discussing the racial issues that touch all of our lives.

Focus on racial identity development

Some schools have had more success getting a predominantly white faculty to talk broadly about racial identity development — for all people — than about white privilege. If you feel that this approach will generate more traction within the school community, start here. They are parallel roads leading toward greater equity and justice. At some point, however, opening the conversation on white privilege is

What Is a White Ally? Educators of Color Respond *(continued)*

- They never undermine what a person of color’s experience is like or minimize his or her emotions by saying that the person of color is “overreacting” or being “too sensitive” when something bad happens.

White allies are committed to action in general, and to directly confronting racist behaviors in particular.

- They stand up against injustice, ask the race-related questions, and support the need for space and time to reflect on one’s part in creating a safe learning and working environment for all.

- They don’t just say these things, but actually *take action*. White allies deal with issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and economics and do not sweep them under the rug. They deal with them head-on through discussion and positive change.

- They take time from busy schedules and competing priorities to support and advance diversity

initiatives within the school. They get involved.

- They are always questioning their own practice and bringing up issues that arise in the community to the greater faculty.

- They say the harsh realities that most white folks do not want to hear.

- They challenge individuals who make inappropriate racial comments (jokes, slurs, stereotypes, etc.).

- They confront their colleagues or peers who are not acting in an appropriate or equitable way.

- They are willing to have difficult conversations and do not leave that role to the people of color in the school.

White allies build real relationships with people of color, while respecting boundaries.

- They do not treat people of color as if they were invisible. They engage them in all aspects of school life.

- They reach out to help students and parents of color learn the norms in the new environment and go out of their way, and out of their comfort zone, in order to get to know a student’s history/background/neighborhood.

- They do not assume an over-familiarity with people of color, nor do they assume that they can or have the right to speak for people of color.

- They do not pretend to know what it feels like to stand in a person of color’s shoes. They do say, “I can’t understand exactly how you feel, but I am outraged on your behalf.”

- They understand why affinity groups are needed in independent schools and do not ask to come to events or to meetings that are designed for and by people of color, especially under the guise of “fighting segregation.”

necessary. “By coming to better appreciate the seriousness of the issue,” write Tim Wise and Greg Blackburn in an *Independent School* article on white privilege, “even persons with different ideological positions should be able to engage in respectful discussion, and then agree to work together toward the creation of more equitable and inclusive independent school environments.”

Develop your own diversity mantra

Here’s one from Shelly Tochluk: “Our ability to notice *systemic, institutional* racism expands with our consciousness regarding unintended *individual* racism.”



PART FOUR

What Schools Can Do to Ensure Inclusion

“What can we as educators and citizens do to ensure that the arc of the moral universe bends towards justice?” — Beverly Daniel Tatum

There is no single solution to the issues of equity and justice in society, or in independent schools. When it comes to diversity work, educators need to be comfortable with the notion of finding multiple solutions, big and small, within their own communities. But there is a general truth at work. Schools that approach the process of developing a well-functioning inclusive community as a systemic concern will have more success than those that don't. If your school has professed a commitment to a diverse school environment and yet struggles to meet this commitment, school leaders need to do more than leave the well-intentioned ideal hanging over the community for individuals to do with as they see fit. They need to lead the way toward change. As the NAIS Principles of Good Practice for

Equity and Justice puts it, “Creating and sustaining an inclusive, equitable, and just independent school community requires commitment, reflection, conscious and deliberate action....”

What follows is a list of possible steps schools can take — or adapt to already existing efforts — in their journey from assimilation to inclusion. All the ideas come from diversity practitioners, heads of school, other educators, and writers long committed to improving school culture and climate in the name of equity and social justice.

✓ **Fold diversity into the mission statement**

Make sure that your school's approach to diversity is mission-driven. The commitment should be expressed clearly in the school's mission statement where it can inform all other work on diversity. In order to get it clear in the mission, the board and head of school first need to understand the value of diversity to the school — for its financial sustainability,

academic excellence, quality of climate, commitment to social justice, etc. If this requires board professional development with a diversity expert, then get the dates on the calendar as soon as possible. Some boards have also formed a Committee on Diversity in order to lead the board process and to make certain that diversity remains a top priority for years to come. Once the board and head are clear about why it matters to diversify the school community, especially regarding race, the community has a much better chance of transformation. This may seem like advice that goes without saying, but a number of diversity directors note that their school's trustees and heads aren't all that sure what the goal of diversity should be or what benchmarks the school needs to achieve. As a result, the schools tend to get stuck at the surface level — working to admit more students of color, but without the sort of systemic changes necessary to be an inclusive community. This sort of partial solution is problematic because it tends to create more communal discord



“Creating and sustaining an inclusive, equitable, and just independent school community requires commitment, reflection, conscious and deliberate action.”

than unity and, ultimately, leads school leaders to believe they should focus the school’s resources on other priorities.

Along with getting clarity about how it can lead the diversity process, a board of trustees needs to push for its own diversification so that it mirrors the racial makeup of the school community. It also needs to ensure that the school funds its commitment to diversity. As one head of school puts it, “Money is action.” Funding diversity means making a commitment to a full-time diversity director, ongoing professional development, community outreach, a climate study, a speaker series, co-curricular activities — essentially, whatever it takes to move the school toward its ideal.

“When there is clarity about the mission and support from the board,” says a head of school, “it’s easy to answer the doubters, to say with confidence, ‘This is who we are.’ ”

✓ Include diversity goals in the strategic plan

Many schools that have developed strategic plans in recent years have included the essential diversity goals for the school within the plans. If you have, or are working on or planning to work on a strategic plan, make sure your school’s commitment to diversity is spelled out clearly, with broad goals outlined.

In one urban school that has been successful in its diversity initiatives, all the work has emanated from one line in the school’s recent strategic plan: “We believe that inclusion of multicultural perspectives broadens and deepens opportunities for learning.” With this fundamental truth spelled out, the school then articulated three essential goals to adhere to this belief: develop a diversity plan that acknowledges this commitment and outlines methods by which progress will be measured; expand efforts to recruit and retain students and faculty from a “breadth of cultural, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds” represented in the school’s region; and increase institutional support for the school’s office of multicultural affairs.

The director of multicultural affairs says that the plan itself, and the process of creating it, has helped enormously in the school’s diversity efforts and in her own ability to help lead the process. Out of the strategic plan, the school developed a follow-up diversity strategic plan that looks at the way diversity informs everything from school climate to curriculum to staff development to communication to the all-important process of establishing diversity benchmarks. “Inclusion in the strategic plan and the development of the diversity plan have been great for the school,”

she says. “The diversity plan in particular has been a wonderful rubric for just about everything the school does.”

Another diversity practitioner puts it this way: “You need that PowerPoint presentation.” If you can’t boil it all down to a series of easily understood bullet points, then the goal is still too vague.

✓ Develop a separate diversity plan

A number of schools take the basic diversity goals from their most recent strategic plans and develop them into separate diversity plans, with detailed benchmarks for each step. One school, for instance, outlines the steps involved in ensuring systemic attention to “the opportunities and challenges present in a pluralistic community” — including “fostering an expansive view of diversity and inclusion, increasing multicultural awareness, building mutually rewarding relationships, and establishing collaborative partnerships that support the school’s purpose.” Specifically, the detailed goals focus on developing a supportive school climate, reviewing and strengthening the multicultural curriculum, diversifying the faculty so that its demographic profile mirrors that of the student body, improving cross-cultural dialogue and general communications with the various constituencies about the school’s commitment to diversity, and developing ways of measuring progress in meeting the diversity goals.

Another school developed a strategic diversity plan with seven essential goals, each accompanied by the steps involved in achieving the goals, the personnel accountable for leading the work, the accompanying financial requirements, and a time frame for accomplishing the goals. The plan starts with the hiring of a diversity

director. It goes on to include specifics on diversifying the student body, faculty, administration, and board, and on developing a multicultural curriculum and an inclusive, anti-bias culture that will ensure the greatest possible chance for success for all.

Still another school has published what it calls a “Diversity Program Guide” that puts the school’s commitment and goals in writing. It’s a place to publish a host of documents under one umbrella so that the school’s commitment is visible to all. In this school, the diversity guide includes the school’s mission statement, statement of philosophy on multicultural education, community standards statement, and policy on religious and cultural observances. Such a guide, says the school’s director of multicultural services, “makes a huge difference in the community. There’s something very powerful about putting one’s commitment in print.” He notes how, first of all, the process helped the school get clarity on what it believes. In addition, he says, it answers a lot of questions from both internal and external constituents. “There’s a lot of misinformation and damaging information out there. Our guide, which we hope to update every two years, helps address all of this with accurate information.” Finally, he says, because schools tend to beat themselves up about diversity issues, the guide is a valuable way of generating hope and encouragement and instilling pride in the work a school has done.

For example, when it comes to the intersection between diversity and the curriculum in the lower school, the importance is highlighted clearly for all: “Diversity in its broadest definition is... integral to the lower school curriculum, providing the means through which

students understand themselves and others in the context of family, community, country, and world.”

The guide includes details on how diversity should be included in all fields of study at all academic levels, and in all co-curricular programs.

✔ **Authorize a diversity climate study for the school**

Evaluate the school climate using an established assessment tool such as NAIS’s Assessment of Inclusivity and Multiculturalism (AIM) or by working with a consulting group experienced in measuring a school’s climate. An article in *Independent School* by Jonathan Cohen, “Evaluating and Improving School Climate for Learning,” outlines the essential value of understanding a school’s climate. “Over the last ten to fifteen years, educational research has underscored what educators and parents have known for generations: school climate is predictive of, and associated with, a range of positive effects for students, from fewer disciplinary incidents and more effective risk prevention/health promotion efforts to improved academic performance. Positive school climate, not surprisingly, also enhances teacher retention.”

The specific goals of AIM are to “determine progress in meeting diversity and multiculturalism goals; identify current diversity and multiculturalism initiatives; encourage participation of all affiliation and affinity groups in assessing the school’s level of inclusivity; facilitate meaningful dialogue; provide benchmarking opportunities; and support a positive community-building process/experience.”

A school that recently did an AIM evaluation was able to acknowledge both its strengths and weaknesses in regard to diversity. For one, it realized that



“Successful diversity directors have to be part of a team of administrators who assure that the school is moving forward.”

most of its diversity efforts were informal and, consequently, that the results were uneven. Through the study, the school decided that it needed to formalize diversity training, programs, initiatives, and activities. As the report puts it, “Specific guidelines, goals, and resources need to be developed into a comprehensive program or initiative to be developed into the school’s existing philosophies, programs, and curriculum.” Specifically, the school decided to establish a dean of diversity, offer formal diversity training to all faculty members and mentoring to new teachers, and define the goals of the board of trustees’ diversity committee. The school also realized it needed a clear process for increasing the diversity of the board of trustees, faculty, staff, administration, and student body. In short, transformation occurs when a school undertakes a formal self-study as it relates to the mission and diversity goals.



“On the personal level, teachers and administrators need to know, ‘What do I get out of this?’ On a professional level, the goal is to see how diversity is connected to excellence in learning.”

✓ Understand demographics

In a day school, if you haven’t done so already, get accurate demographic figures for your area — not just your immediate neighborhood, but the entire region from which you draw students. Also compile the demographics of the other independent schools in your region and state. If you are not close to the mean number, make sure that you establish a plan to reach that number within a few years. Consider the various populations of students of color. Are there any groups that your school is not reaching? If so, begin to plan outreach to these communities.

Consider the ways in which your teaching staff, board, and administration are diverse (if not in race, then in gender, age, sexual orientation, learning styles, religion, physical ability, etc.). Acknowledging the value of this diversity in other areas can help guide the process of improving racial diversity in the school.

✓ Appoint a full-time diversity director

Most of the schools with the greatest level of success in diversity have full-time diversity practitioners on staff. “Some folks at [my school] questioned the idea of a full-time diversity director,” says one diversity director. “But believe me, it’s a very busy position, similar to that of assistant head of school — working with the board and faculty and parents and administration.”

Most experts agree that the diversity director should be a senior-level administrator who reports directly to the head of school. This person leads the school’s diversity initiatives, but with broad support from the school community. In particular, he or she collaborates with the admissions office, the dean of faculty, the dean of students, the alumni and development office, the communications office, the head of school, and the board of trustees. Specific areas of focus include faculty recruitment, development, and retention; student admissions and student life; curriculum development; family and community outreach; and board development. The diversity director may spend a great deal of time supporting students of color and their families, and in coordinating diversity events at school, but schools committed to systemic change will also make sure that the diversity director is deeply involved in every aspect of this change.

“The mistake some schools make is to hire a diversity director, then assume that person will lead the process all by him or herself,” says a head of school. “Successful diversity directors have to be part of a team of administrators who assure that the school is moving forward.”

A diversity consultant also argues for ongoing mentoring for diversity directors, preferably from outside the school, given the complex nature of the job — and the clear need for strong organizational skills. “A lot of young people of color are in this position,” she says. “Without support, they can end up with acculturation issues of their own, and work from a position of pain and anger, which is not what schools want or need.”

Sample job descriptions for the position of diversity director or director of multicultural affairs are available through the NAIS website (www.nais.org).

✓ Establish a faculty/staff diversity committee

In addition to a full-time diversity director, some schools find it helpful to establish a faculty/staff diversity committee, led by the school’s diversity director. For one, it gets more people involved in diversity work within the community, which not only improves the chances of success, but also improves the overall climate of the school by making the transformation of the school a shared effort. Having representation across disciplines and divisions, as well as among faculty and staff, also offers a cross-fertilization of ideas that can generate more input into, and support for, diversity initiatives.

✓ Make sure diversity goals are part of everyone’s annual goals

Schools can and should evaluate administrators and teachers on their understanding of and commitment to developing and supporting a diverse community. Annual goals for staff, faculty, and administrators should include goals that are directly connected to the school’s diversity goals, with details on how they will be achieved. To this

end, one diversity director suggests that the faculty revisit the school's diversity statement at the beginning of each year as a way to focus everyone's commitment to it.

Faculty commitment is crucial to the success of any diversity initiative. Says a diversity director, "On the personal level, teachers and administrators need to know, 'What do I get out of this?' On a professional level, the goal is to see how diversity is connected to excellence in learning." The more clearly teachers and administrators see the value of diversity on both levels, the easier it will be for the community to move forward.

✓ **Be clear about expectations for curricular changes**

As William F. Pinar, professor of curriculum and pedagogy at the University of British Columbia, writes in *What Is Curriculum Theory?*, "The school curriculum communicates what we choose to remember about our past, what we believe about the present, what we hope for the future."

Many independent schools have a great deal of autonomy when it comes to what and how they teach. Unfortunately, since few educators have been trained in teaching in a multicultural setting, complete teacher autonomy is not going to work for all students. Yet there are ways school can insist on changes in the curriculum that will make it more inclusive while honoring the individuality of teachers. It can be as simple as coordinating goals for the year. After the entire faculty reviews the school's diversity goals at the beginning of the school year, for instance, individual departments can look more specifically at changes in their own discipline. It can also involve ongoing professional development in multicultural education.

One school went a step further and invited in experts to help outline broad changes in the curriculum — essential guidelines for each department in each division — and published the results.

The final collection of curricular guidelines touches every major discipline: language arts, science, history, math, foreign languages, visual and performing arts, and physical education.

This is also an opportunity to examine all co-curricular activities and support groups within the school, and community-service programs outside the school. In particular, says one director of diversity, schools should consciously educate students about equity and social justice issues. "We want to teach them to treat each other with respect, but also to stand up to racism," she says. This won't happen without conscious effort.

To this end, a school in Washington, D.C., requires all ninth-grade students to take a diversity course designed to increase their racial awareness and ability to live and work in a multicultural setting. One of the side benefits of the program is that it involves educators from a number of different departments, which means valuable input from a broad range of faculty members. "It's a de facto diversity department," says one of the school's directors of diversity.

✓ **Openly address the problem of faculty resistance**

A number of people interviewed for this piece remarked on the high level of resistance coming from some faculty members within their schools. "The leadership gets it and the students get it," says a dean of faculty, "but faculty in the middle are more resistant." Adds an urban diversity director, "There is almost across-the-board resistance from teachers at [my school]. They like



It's easy to dismiss efforts at diversity when you are facing a room full of other white educators. But it's harder to face a group of teachers of color and tell them that their perspectives are not important.

their autonomy and see any mandates for change in the curriculum or teaching styles to accommodate a diverse student body as an infringement on their academic freedom."

What is the answer? One teacher says that simply adding more teachers of color to the faculty will help with the shift. It's easy to dismiss efforts at diversity when you are facing a room full of other white educators. But it's harder to face a group of teachers of color and tell them that their perspectives are not important. With a more diverse faculty, an English teacher argues, the "resistance will go down because there'd be a higher degree of understanding that will move the school closer to its ideal."

Administrators can also hammer away with this statement from another diversity director: "Schools can't stay the same, can't offer the same curriculum as they did 20 years ago, and call themselves excellent schools."



“Schools can’t stay the same, can’t offer the same curriculum as they did 20 years ago, and call themselves excellent schools.”

In the hiring process, be sure that all candidates — regardless of race — have a level of awareness of diversity, and a commitment to being part of a school community in transition. If a school claims that a diverse community is important, then a teaching candidate’s knowledge and experience with diversity is as important as his or her knowledge of, say, biology or history. Schools should also focus professional-development funds aimed at helping the current teachers develop a deeper understanding of diversity and how it connects to their own classroom work.

Schools can also educate all staff involved in hiring about how to interview a diverse group of candidates. The tendency is to hire candidates like ourselves unless trained to see the value in hiring a person who brings different but valuable skills to the school. To this end, schools particularly need clear hiring procedures for all

candidates, white and of color. In a survey of administrators of color, many noted that their interview was much different from that of white candidates for the same position. It included, among other things, a much deeper background check, as if the school were deeply suspicious of the candidates of color. Not surprisingly, being singled out for such treatment based on the color of their skin did not sit well with these candidates.

✓ **Open up the dialogue on race**

Because there will no doubt be a broad spectrum of views on a school’s level of commitment to diversity, opening the dialogue means that all voices need to be heard. Schools can do this in numerous ways. One popular approach is through a series of all-faculty or division or department meetings. In preparation for the meetings, the school can assign shared reading, or invite in guest speakers, or arrange a shared viewing of films like *Mirrors of Privilege: Making Whiteness Visible* (available through Wold Trust, www.world-trust.org). In the study of literature, a popular exercise is to ask students to write what are called “difficulty paragraphs.” It’s a simple exercise. Find a place in the play, poem, story, or novel that you find difficult for one reason or another. Then describe that difficulty, exploring the problems you find in the language, images, or themes. The process helps lead students to greater clarity about the literature and their own perceptions of it. Members of an administrative team or faculty group can write their “difficulty paragraphs” regarding the school’s diversity efforts. What bothers you about the process? What is troubling? What are the challenges in

your job as a teacher or administrator? Sharing the paragraphs in honest discussion can uncover shared concerns and problems, which, in a committed school, will lead to greater clarity about what needs to be addressed to help the school meet its mission.

✓ **Address white identity and privilege**

See “Addressing White Privilege and Identity” on page 16.

✓ **Pay attention to the effects of diversity on college counseling — and the effects of competition on diversity**

At one school with a diverse student body and an increasingly diverse faculty, some of the good work on diversity is undone around college admissions time when students start comparing college acceptances. Some white students end up feeling bitter that students of color with lower GPAs got into Ivy League schools that rejected them. From a distance, one might be inclined to dismiss this pettiness and oversimplification of the college admissions process, but if even a few white students and their families feel this way, schools should address it systemically starting in the junior year. Among the last things schools with diversity mission statements want are graduates leaving with a bitter feeling about race, believing that someone “took my spot at Princeton,” or wherever. Schools need to be very clear about the fact that some students will feel this way, and begin to address it, explaining, among other things, the complex decision-making behind college admissions — including the admission of legacies and athletes — and why colleges want to, or need to, look at aspects other than pure academic achievement.

A related problem is the problem of excessive competition. When schools focus too intensely on high grades and prizes and lists of top students and college admissions lists, they also tend to pit one student against another in an imagined battle for top honors and top college admissions. Numerous writers (Madeline Levine, Adam Howard, Alfie Kohn, for example) warn of the problems of competition in schools. Schools need to counteract this sense of competition as best they can so that students don't feel isolated from one another and don't begin to imagine that, for instance, more students of color on campus will hurt a white student's chances of getting into Stanford. Collaborative, supportive communities are more genuinely multicultural than schools that place too high a premium on individual academic performance.

✓ **Study the student attrition rate**

Are your students of color leaving the school at a more significant rate than white students? Are teachers of color moving on after a couple years? Have you had a high turnover rate in the diversity office? These are signs of cultural and climate issues. Schools should also study the academic success of their students of color. One urban school was shocked to discover that the achievement levels of African-American students were similar to that of white students in elementary school, but dropped off significantly at the middle school level. They have since partnered with a nearby university to study the problem. Such knowledge is essential for schools to improve the quality of education they offer for all students and the quality of life they offer all faculty members. In studying attrition rates, a diversity consultant offers this one piece of advice: "Assume that race is the issue until you can prove otherwise."

✓ **Examine the degree to which the school embraces outmoded notions of intelligence**

Howard Gardner, with his theory of multiple intelligences, has offered all educators a nuanced notion of intelligence that focuses on a variety of strengths. Recent brain research, meanwhile, has revealed that intelligence is not a fixed thing based on genetics, but that the brain, like a muscle, can be developed through use. Yet we still tend to rely on past notions of intelligence — and on measuring intelligence through standardized tests.

Reconsidering our views on intelligence first means that we examine this outmoded notion of intelligence. Even the inventor of the first standardized intelligence test, French psychologist Alfred Binet, believed that intelligence was too multidimensional to reduce to a single test score — and that such a test should not be used for ranking of all children. But, of course, this is exactly what we have done, and continue to do, in America. Interestingly, each historic push for measuring intelligence, Beverly Daniel Tatum points out in *Can We Talk About Race?*, related to some direct threat to the dominant Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture — from the influx of immigrants (in 1912, the test revealed that 83 percent of immigrant Jews were "feeble-minded"), to the 1960s Civil Rights Movement (when tests led to a significant connection between race and educational tracking, with European-Americans being the primary beneficiaries), to a period of economic downturn (when the publication of *The Bell Curve* implied that our troubles were related to a watering-down of national intelligence through the increase in the number of people of color in the nation). All of this lousy pseudo-science, Tatum



In studying attrition rates, a diversity consultant offers this one piece of advice: "Assume that race is the issue until you can prove otherwise."

writes, along with the "long tradition of stereotypical representations of Black and Latino people in popular culture as either stupid, lazy, dangerous, hypersexual, or all of those things combined," leads to the likelihood that "Black and Latino children will enter school situations in which they are disadvantaged from the beginning by a teacher's lowered expectations as compared to those he or she may have for the White students in the class."

✓ **Make it easier for students of color to apply to your school**

Families that are considering an independent school for the first time can be overwhelmed by the application process. As one California school puts it in its diversity plan, "An effort should be made to remove barriers and cumbersome procedures from the admissions process every step of the way."



“Teachers must first recognize that students of color may be particularly vulnerable in white-dominated spaces to experiencing student and teacher behaviors as exclusionary.”

✓ Develop the cross-cultural competency of the entire faculty, especially white educators

There are numerous conferences and workshops — including those run by AISNE — that can help educators develop cross-cultural competencies. But it also helps to spend sustained time in cultures different from your own. If your school can afford it, consider encouraging teachers to use their sabbaticals to travel abroad to a culture outside their realm of experience — to get out of their cultural comfort zone. It’s the quickest way to “get it,” say a number of educators of color. Schools could also develop teacher exchange programs, not with high-end schools abroad, but with urban schools in the U.S. or on Native American reservations, places where an independent school educator is going to have to make some cultural adjustments. Holly Carter, a professor of education at Northeastern

University who works with independent schools as a diversity consultant, has arranged for white educators to teach in township schools in South Africa. Closer to home, as noted earlier, she also sends teachers into inner-city neighborhoods on “cultural scavenger hunts.” The teachers must travel by public transportation, just as their urban students will in coming to an independent school, and introduce themselves to people within the community. It helps teachers develop what she calls “experiential empathy.”

✓ Take systemic steps to support an increasingly diverse student body

In 2007, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) revised its standards for independent school accreditation to include one titled “The Experience of Students.” This new standard requires a school to actively consider the needs of individual students and develop “plans, policies, programs, and pedagogy to nurture, support, and encourage all students to reach their potential and to participate in the life of the school.” It is designed to help schools support a broad diversity of students, and is accompanied by twelve suggested indicators that schools are encouraged to adopt. Schools would do well to embrace all twelve, but, at the very least, they should fold the following into their practices and policies:

- The school recognizes differences within the student body such as gender, learning style or ability, race, age, ethnicity, family background, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and religious practice, and actively responds to students’ and adults’ positive or negative experiences.

- Time is made available on a regular basis for teachers to learn ways in which their cultural backgrounds help or hinder their ability to plan together to work with students, parents, and other adults in the community.
- There is a process in place to see how the school’s programs need to change to reflect the diversity of cultural experiences and to identify adults and/or students who will need additional support to function effectively in a pluralistic environment.
- The school promotes an equitable, just, and inclusive community that inspires students to respect and value diversity and to be active and responsible citizens and has ways to ensure that this objective is met.

✓ Adopt the Responsive Classroom Curriculum

Developed by the Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc, the Responsive Classroom approach to elementary education consists of “practical strategies for bringing together social and academic learning throughout the school day, every day.” The curriculum, first established in 1981 and used widely in public and private schools, is based on seven core principles that put social development on par with academic achievement, consider the learning styles of every student in the classroom, and keep the student-family-school connection central. As one principal puts it, “Knowing the children we teach — individually, culturally, and developmentally — is as important as knowing the content we teach.” Details are available at www.responsiveclassroom.org. For the high school level, the Northeast Foundation for Children recommends that schools looking for guidance on improving the balance of social and academic learning adapt the practices established by Educators for Social Responsibility, www.esrnational.org.

✓ **Develop antiracist practices**

When working inside a school with a clear commitment to diversity, it helps if all teachers and administrators develop an array of antiracist practices and share these with each other. When educators develop seemingly simple antiracist habits and practice them everyday, they can transform a community by their myriad examples.

Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real About Race in School, edited by Mica Pollock, offers guidance into these daily practices — how to talk about race and equal opportunity; how to uncover internalized oppression and talk about that; how to help students develop as individuals within a race-conscious society; and how to help students develop cross-cultural fluency. The book includes a checklist of antiracist strategies, including ways to change a system that is unequal while working within the system.

✓ **Create safe spaces for students of color in predominantly white classrooms**


As sociologist Pamela Perry writes in “Creating Safe Spaces in Predominantly White Classrooms” (a chapter in *Everyday Antiracism*), “Teachers must first recognize that students of color may be particularly vulnerable in white-dominated spaces to experiencing student and teacher behaviors as exclusionary or stigmatizing.” Research by bell hooks and others indicates that students of color in predominantly white schools — public or private — often experience what John Powell calls “race wrestling.” Dorinda Carter, another contributor to *Everyday Antiracism* and a professor of education at Michigan State University, describes her own experience with race

wrestling this way: “I often wondered if my White peers thought my work was comparable to their own. I wondered if a teacher marked an A on my paper because the work met his standards for the assignment or if he thought this was the best a Black student could do. I sometimes hesitated to answer questions posed by the teacher, wondering if anyone would deem my response inadequate coming from my Black body. Yet, when I was not asked to share my ideas with the class, I wondered if it was because the teacher felt that a Black person had little to add to the discussion.”

It is an admittedly tricky proposition to simultaneously be aware of the concerns of students of color and to make sure you are treating all students fairly. And you can’t assume that all students will enter the class with such worries and fears. But Dorinda Carter will tell you that it is important that you don’t shy away from this work. Mica Pollock’s research in a California high school points out that without the awareness of these issues teachers were actually “focusing negatively on Black students and actively ignored them.” There is no single prescription for success here. But the goal is to consciously adopt antiracist practices in order to make sure that all students feel welcomed, supported, and heard.

✓ **Help students “think outside their privilege”**

Adam Howard, professor at Colby College and a former independent school teacher, writes in *Learning Privilege* that we should help students “think outside their privilege in order to gain new understandings and to develop a more critical awareness of the world around



“To some extent, we are always working against the dominant culture,” says a head of school, “so we have to be smart about how we bring folks along.”

them.” This is particularly important in independent schools where a high percentage of wealthy white students spend their precollegiate years. Howard’s book offers insights into how schools can help students understand and work against privilege. In particular, he encourages educators to honestly examine the hidden curriculum of many independent schools — where success is too often defined in competitive terms that tend to isolate students, discourage risk-taking, and avoid inquiry into the important social issues of our times. Schools, he argues, should work harder to help students find the connection between the curriculum and their own lives by presenting “diverse perspectives, experiences, and contributions, particularly those that have been traditionally omitted from the school’s official curriculum.”



As long as a school can both educate some families [about its diversity program] while advocating for others, it will move forward to greater success.

✓ Expect community pushback — and communicate goals clearly

One head of school admits that his knees shook as the lead administration team planned faculty discussions on the topic of white privilege and identity — not because he didn't believe the topic was important, but because he knew there would be some sort of community resistance, whether it be full-paying parents deciding to pull their children out of the school because of concerns that the school was no longer a "safe place" for their children, or having to work through faculty resistance to open discussions, or having to deal with misinformation within the community (like the rumor that the school had started a white supremacy group when, in fact, it had started a white affinity group).

"To some extent, we are always working against the dominant culture," says a head of school, "so we have to be smart about how we bring folks along." He admitted that he has sought well-connected and respected members of the community to be involved in the process — "people," he says, "that others can't dismiss."

A number of diversity directors echo this need for school leaders to be politically savvy — to know the school community well enough to push for change without pushing so hard that people react in knee-jerk fashion.

A Seattle-area school, now with over 40 percent students of color, has some real experience with this scenario after suffering through intense pushback for its diversity efforts. After the school rescinded an invitation to a conservative speaker whose writings on race were considered offensive by the school's faculty, a local newspaper headline read, "Good Intentions Turn into Community Backlash at Prestigious Prep School." In the process of addressing the backlash, the school, with the guidance of the communications office, developed essential talking points to ease fears and address criticism.

Ultimately, the school learned that it had to be crystal clear about its commitment to diversity; inform both internal and external audiences about the work, emphasizing core values, even at the risk of sounding repetitive; and provide regular updates on progress and changes while offering avenues for two-way communication.

A diversity director at another school uses a simple mantra regarding diversity and communications: "No surprises." At the same time, she describes a successful program as "a program that parents of color can happily take part in."

✓ Plan on family outreach

The same Seattle-area school also created a new position — the family support liaison — both to help families of color and to respond to concerns of white families uncertain about what the school's cultural and curricular changes mean for them. As long as a school can both educate some families while advocating for others, it will move forward with greater success than it would otherwise do. The overall goal is to find a way to support as many families as possible and help them feel like important members of the school community.

This office can help a school develop a more sophisticated way of connecting with families — including holding parent conferences in locations other than the school, holding fund-raising events at locations that will attract a broad range of parents, and extending personal invitations to parents who are generally under-represented in parent events. It can also monitor the level of communication between teachers and families of color to ensure that it's equal to the level of communication between teachers and white families. A number of diversity directors report a high level of disparity in this area, as if white educators were actually afraid to contact parents of color.

The office can also offer help to all families with any concerns they may have — regarding transportation, technology, college counseling, family issues, school issues, etc.

✓ **Establish a teaching fellowship for new teachers of color**

Like a handful of other schools, a Massachusetts school recently established a fellowship for new teachers of color, which comes with a stipend of \$25,000, plus housing and benefits. It is designed to introduce young teachers of color to independent education. Schools offer a variety of fellowships and scholarships. Why not follow this school's lead and establish a fellowship to attract talented young teachers of color to your school?

✓ **Develop a new community paradigm**

The Reach Center in Seattle, Washington, has developed what it describes as “a new paradigm for the human community.” In the current dominant paradigm, as the Reach Center notes, humanity dominates nature, men dominate women, whites dominate nonwhites, Christians dominate non-Christians, heterosexuals dominate homosexuals. Acknowledging these dominant relations allow us to identify what the ideal paradigm should look like. In excellent schools today, we should find ways to be in closer harmony with nature, push for gender equity, demand racial understanding and justice of ourselves and the society, aim for religious and spiritual pluralism, and make one's sexual orientation and any outward signs of that orientation a matter of social indifference. Ultimately, our goal is to encompass the belief that diversity is not a problem, but an opportunity for humanity to live up to its name.

Final Thoughts: Toward a New Paradigm

Talking about race is not something we do well in this country. Just a few weeks after taking office, U.S. Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. bluntly described us as a “nation of cowards” when it comes to discussing race. While saying he'd have advised a better choice of words, President Barack Obama did support Holder's essential point. Responding to a *New York Times* reporter, Obama said, “We're often times uncomfortable with talking about race until there's some sort of racial flare-up or conflict. We could probably be more constructive in facing up to... the painful legacy of slavery and Jim Crow and discrimination.” The tact of his words aside, Obama is telling us something quite clearly: When it comes to discussing race matters, we may not be cowards, but we could be a lot braver.

Without question, race remains a sensitive topic in this nation — one that most of us tend to talk around, rather than confront directly. Any school that has made serious efforts to move forward with diversity knows this well. In this light, independent schools, working in the shadow of the broader culture, deserve a lot of credit for the work they've done toward racial justice



Ultimately, our goal is to encompass the belief that diversity is not a problem, but an opportunity for humanity to live up to its name.

and overall inclusion — and deserve a lot of support for the continuing work that still needs to be done. The good news is that schools have made progress, and our knowledge improves every year. What we now know should give us all hope and encouragement. Schools, guided by thoughtful leadership, *can* become truly inclusive communities — strengthened by diversity, an effective multicultural curriculum, an improved culture and climate, and the knowledge that they are helping this democracy of ours fulfill its vision.

About the Author

Michael Brosnan is the editor of *Independent School* magazine and author of *Against the Current: How One School Struggled and Succeeded with At-Risk Kids* (Heinemann). He is the author of two previous AISNE monographs on diversity in schools: “Hiring and Retaining Teachers of Color” and “Thriving in Independent Schools.” Both are available through www.aisne.org.



AISNE

Association of Independent Schools in New England

222 Forbes Road, Suite 106, Braintree, MA 02184

www.aisne.org