

From the
DIRECTOR OF
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY

Angela R. Birts



Diversity: The Fabric of Our Community

It has been two years since I accepted the position of Director of Diversity and Inclusion. I was brought back to Menlo—I am 2004 graduate—in part to help the School achieve its goal as outlined in its strategic vision plan *Challenge 2012*,

which charged Menlo to “continue to make the School more heterogeneous and inclusive.” When I began my new assignment, I was asked to develop a positioning statement and create a strategic plan for diversity at Menlo. As a person of color and someone who loves Menlo, I was eager to embrace this work. As I began, I quickly discovered that our school lacked a shared understanding of diversity. Before I could turn my attention to my original charge, I needed to develop a definition that would put us



all on common ground. This was an exciting challenge. To approach it, I engaged faculty, parents and students and formed an Equity, Inclusivity and Diversity (EID) committee to help me with this effort.

In our committee, we worked to find a definition that authentically weaves diversity into the fabric of the Menlo community and its goal of inclusivity. Traditionally, diversity is thought of in terms of race, gender and/or culture. On a broader level it includes class, sexual orientation, religion, ability and appearance.

“We are better educated and prepared for success when the School community is diverse and inclusive.”

One of Menlo’s college counselors recently explained that valuing diversity involves “**upholding the dignity and worth of every individual.**” His profound statement resonated deeply with our committee. Coupling this statement with Menlo’s commitment to inclusivity—instead of overemphasis on nuanced, individual differences—is a more viable means for building and sustaining an inclusive school. We can measure our growth by maintaining equitable policies, programs and practices that ensure that all students feel they belong here. This is the best way to achieve our stated commitment to diversity and inclusion.

With a definition taking shape, I returned to my original priority of developing a strategic diversity plan. The EID committee—comprised of more than 30 faculty and parents—set about to develop a five-year plan that addresses five central areas of inclusivity: student inclusiveness, professional development for faculty and staff, faculty recruitment and retention, family support and engagement, and admissions outreach. In addition to shaping the strategic plan, the committee facilitated an all-school in-service to solicit feedback from faculty and hosted two evening sessions to garner input from families.

To have defined and developed a strategic plan for diversity is enormously satisfying. The fact that so many faculty, staff, students and parents coalesced around the topic reflects a larger theme emerging at Menlo. Our efforts not only map onto our core values, but also are the result of a dedicated and committed community that clearly understands the transformative nature of this work. Simply put, we are better educated and prepared for success when

the School community is diverse and inclusive. Yet this is just the beginning. We must now work to put these words and plans into place. What happens next? At their last meeting, Menlo's Board of Trustees unanimously approved the recommendations found in our strategic diversity plan. Now we must put the vision into action. This work will require commitment and effort from each of us, and I invite parents to contact me or our MSPA diversity liaisons, Nkia Richardson and Cecilia Barajas, to learn more about the five central areas of inclusivity. Together we can weave the fabric that will make us an even stronger community.

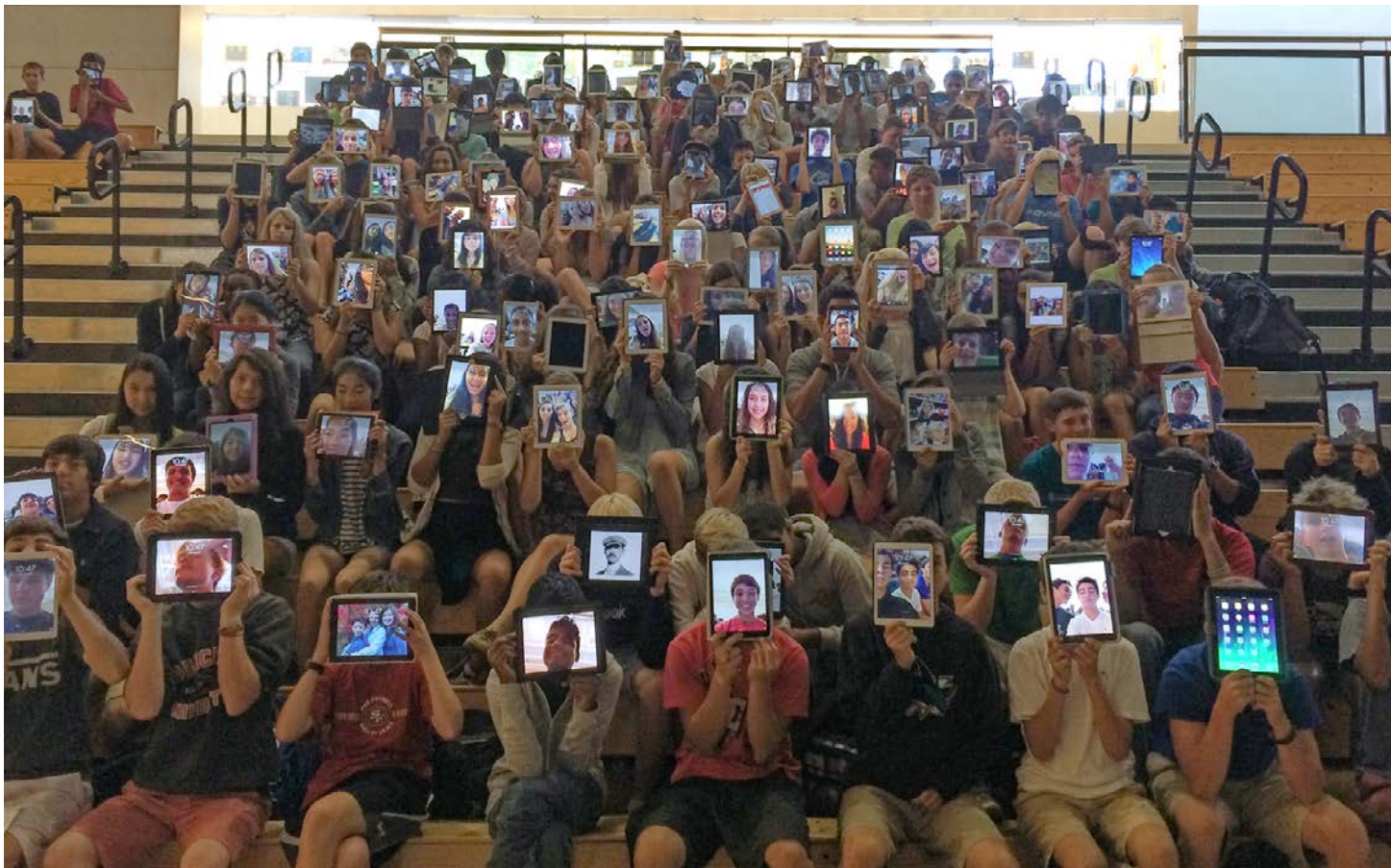
Sincerely,



Angela R. Birts

Director of Diversity and Inclusion

Editor's Note: Learn more about Menlo's Equity, Inclusivity and Diversity program [here](#).



KnightLine is published in .pdf form on the Menlo School website each month, with an email alert including a link sent to all parents. For questions, please contact Alex Perez, Director of Communications, via email at alex.perez@menloschool.org or by calling 650.330.2001 ext. 2330.

