

From the
**DIRECTOR OF
DIVERSITY AND
INCLUSION**

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Diversity Update: A Movement, Not a Moment

One of Menlo's core values is to "appreciate the richness of diversity," and in 2014, the board enthusiastically adopted a five-year diversity strategic plan that has given us the opportunity to more fully realize this value. We've been working hard to implement this plan, and throughout the past two years, it has been a joy to witness faculty, staff, parents, and students uniting to ensure that Menlo truly becomes a more inclusive community. As the Director of Diversity and Inclusion and an alumna of the School, I feel supported and affirmed by others' enthusiasm for this work, and I am excited to share with you several highlights of what we are doing to impact change and offer insights of what's to come.

At the plan's core are five actionable initiatives that underscore Menlo's commitment to creating respect and appreciation for diversity and inclusion. These include family support and engagement, student inclusiveness, professional development, faculty/staff recruitment and retention, and admissions outreach. In our work so far,

we've made strides in all of these areas. What have we accomplished so far?

We began by separating this work into annual themes. Last year we focused on "Seeking Buy In." To this end, we engaged members of our community through a variety of diversity workshops, conferences, and professional learning opportunities. Many faculty and parents joined the Equity, Inclusivity, and Diversity Committee and added their voices to the discussion of diversity-related topics such as gender, race, and religion.

Menlo also launched the national Seeking Educational Equity, and Diversity (SEED) project on our campus in 2014, and joined a network of 2,200 educators, parents, and community leaders working in schools to increase diversity and inclusivity on their campuses. Two teachers—one from each division—were selected to lead these efforts. They attended an intensive week-long training where they learned about promoting greater self-reflection, multiculturalism, equity, and social justice, and gained the skills to facilitate this work at Menlo. SEED currently meets monthly and is open to faculty and staff.

Through our community's greater engagement in this work, I have been able to connect on a deeper level with individuals and groups and learn more about the many cultural identities that make up the School's diversity.

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As one faculty member observed, “The community is talking and working toward commons goals that require collaboration, risk-taking, humility, honesty, and reflection.” I am in awe at how the diversity strategic plan has empowered different groups to leverage their skills, knowledge, voice, and leadership to change the School’s culture for the better.

Now, in year two, the diversity strategic plan’s focus is on “Building Our Language.” The term “cultural competency” has been the topic of many of our discussions. Simply put, it describes one’s ability to successfully teach students and/or work with individuals who come from backgrounds other than our own. Equipping all members of the Menlo School community to develop the language, awareness, and sensitivities to better serve others is no easy task so the school has hired a consulting firm, Jones and Associates Consulting, to assist us in our pursuit. They contend that there are 13 cultural competency skills—such as “listen to understand vs. listen to respond,” “greet others genuinely and make an effort to pronounce their name accurately,” and “lean into discomfort”—that are all necessary for enhancing our diversity efforts and community as a whole.

We have begun putting these skills to practice. For example, at the holiday assembly, six Middle and Upper School students shared their family’s holiday traditions, and other recent Middle School assemblies have focused on religious and cultural celebrations such as Diwali. In the Upper School, we welcomed a guest

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speaker who spoke about the Black Lives Matter movement and then returned to campus to more deeply discuss and engage with our students on the topic.

Menlo has sent six students and several faculty members to the annual People of Color Conference and Student Diversity Leadership Conference. They joined peers from other NAIS schools across the country for panel discussions, presentations by guest speakers, and intimate sessions exploring race and sexuality. A deeply impactful and thought-provoking experience, the conference demonstrated to our students the value of making connections, speaking out, and engaging in courageous conversation about difficult topics. The students also brought back many great ideas to implement at Menlo as part of our ongoing efforts to create an inclusive school climate and enhance the student experience.

One way we’ve found the student experience can be enhanced is when parents are comfortable being involved in the life of the School. I have personally seen the positive effect when we can connect families with information and



access to programs who would otherwise be hindered by barriers such as language and work schedules. It's moving to watch a family light up when they feel connected and fully engaged in our rich programs. This year, we have improved access for some families by contracting a professional translator to interpret parent-teacher

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what it's like to experience Menlo School without feeling a complete sense of belonging. I am excited about the progress we've made, but it will take the entire community's involvement to keep the momentum moving forward. I want to hear your thoughts about what's working and what we can do better to promote diversity and inclusion at Menlo. As such, we'll be inviting you to participate in the Assessment of Inclusivity and Multiculturalism (AIM) Online Climate Survey next week. This comprehensive

conferences, Parent Education Night, and Back-to-School Night in Spanish. Our efforts to connect more deeply with families will continue as we identify more ways to reach and engage the parent community.

This work is important to me as I know firsthand

assessment tool will help us see how we are doing as compared with other NAIS schools and establish a baseline for the diversity strategic plan. You'll receive more information about this from Than Healy in the coming week, and we thank you in advance for your participation.



Looking forward, we are excited about upcoming diversity programs such as this weekend's Global Expo as well as the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day assembly (January 28) and the MSPA workshop with Jones and Associates (January 22) on cultural competency skill development, which seeks to further our strategic efforts to build a common language.

It's incredibly rewarding and challenging to work in a school that is determined to acknowledge, celebrate, and promote all forms of diversity.



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.

