



## DIVERSITY AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Powerful 21<sup>st</sup> Century realities now call schools in the Association of Independent Maryland & DC Schools (AIMS) to make a greater institutional commitment to diversity. In this context, diversity refers not only to legally protected groups, or to the "big eight" categories, but to the entire range of human variability. Broadly understood, diversity requires an ongoing process by which a school lives and breathes its commitment to include different peoples and perspectives into its community, curriculum, and culture.

To maintain educational excellence, to prepare students for a changing world, and to further the aims of a nation dedicated to great ideals of social justice and equity, AIMS urges school leaders to galvanize their communities to be more inclusive in seeking talented students, teachers, and administrators; to forge multicultural curricula; and to create and sustain cultures that better reflect the enormous variety among people. The ability of AIMS schools to thrive in the future will depend in part upon their ability to make good on the promise of diversity ideals by implementing concrete and far-reaching changes.<sup>1</sup>

Support for diversity in its many forms will encourage students to challenge their assumptions, take intellectual risks, and learn to work collaboratively with different kinds of people. Moreover, the acquisition of multicultural competencies is now critically important for every student.<sup>2</sup>

Research shows that diversity in schools supports educational excellence; that demographic and economic changes are accelerating; and that in

other sectors of society, notably in business and higher education, diversity has become essential to institutional success:

- Because human variety plays an important role in the intellectual, social, and emotional development of children, diversity is closely related to educational excellence. Students "learn more and think in deeper, more complex ways in a diverse educational environment...and they are better prepared to become active participants in our pluralistic, democratic society."<sup>3</sup> Diversity also brings texture and richness into students' lives and challenges them to grow intellectually and emotionally through a process of understanding and synthesizing differing points of view.

- In 1995, the United States population was estimated to be 74% non-Hispanic White. By 2050, the non-Hispanic White population will have decreased to just over one-half of the total population. After 2020, the Hispanic population is projected to add more people to the United States every year than will all other groups combined.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*, Scott E. Page (Princeton University Press 2007).

<sup>2</sup> "... education for the twenty-first century must not only help students to become literate and reflective citizens who can participate productively in the workforce but it must also teach them to care about other people in their communities and to take personal, social, and civic action to create a more humane and just society." *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*, James A. Banks (Allyn and Bacon 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Expert Report of Patricia Gunn. *Gratz vs. Bollinger, et al.*, No. 97-75321 (E.D. Michigan).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Report. Local demographics often mirror these national trends. In Montgomery County, Maryland, for example, the non-White population will grow by 56% between 2010 and 2030. Maryland State Data Center.

- Major corporations understand the importance of diversity to institutional excellence, effectiveness, and success. Recruiting and retaining talented employees from diverse populations and reaching diverse consumers are important elements of successful business strategies.<sup>5</sup>

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## DIVERSITY AND SCHOOL LEADERS

Only through a compelling vision and sustained dedicated leadership will a school's commitment to diversity change from passive to active - from expressions of heartfelt intentions to concrete steps towards institutional transformation.

Diversity training is recommended for all school constituencies. As with other areas critical to a school's success - pedagogy and curriculum development, for example - diversity practice must be supported by a solid understanding of the most recent research, theory, and thinking.

### *The Board of Trustees*

- Working with the Head of School, the Board develops and approves a formal diversity statement, either within the mission statement or separately, which both defines diversity in relation to the school's mission and articulates a clear rationale for its importance to the school. The statement is widely distributed, including to parents and alumni. School leaders at all levels are consistent and clear about the school's commitment to diversity.
- The composition of the Board reflects its commitment to diversity and is a model to the entire school community.
- Trustees receive diversity training. Although Trustees play no role in the daily management of the school, their understanding of diversity issues is crucial to their ability to make wise decisions about whom to hire as Head of School, school policy, funding priorities, and strategic planning.

- The Board ensures that diversity is an important part of the Head of School's responsibilities and provides the resources necessary, including financial.

- The Board's agenda reflects the importance of diversity by dedicating the time necessary at regular meetings for trustees to stay informed about diversity good practice and to make wise diversity policy decisions for the school community.

### *The Head of School*

- The Head of School dedicates sufficient time and focus to diversity. Without the Head's direct, intensive involvement, diversity may not be viewed as important as other school priorities. Moreover, the Head's vision and determination are often essential in helping others in the community to understand the importance of diversity to the school's mission and to its students. Only the Head can ensure that diversity is a priority for all constituencies.
- The Head ensures that all members of the school community receive diversity training, including the administrative team, faculty, staff, students, and parents.
- The Head of School places a high priority on attracting and retaining a diverse administration and faculty, not only because students need and deserve such role models and resources, but also because diversity among the adult professionals brings energy and insight to the school's efforts to diversify its curriculum and culture. To reach out to diverse candidates, the Head goes beyond traditional employment resources and establishes direct contacts with colleges, universities, and other community resources that serve historically underrepresented people.
- The Head of School assures that the school's curriculum, pedagogy, and culture reflect the school's commitment to diversity and the need to teach multicultural competencies in order to prepare students for an increasingly diverse world.

<sup>5</sup> *Diversity as Business Strategy*, David A. Thomas, Harvard Business Review (September 2004).

- By communicating a school's more recent history and vision, the Head of School makes every effort to overcome feelings of mistrust among people for whom historic patterns of exclusion endure as painful memories.
- The Head of School institutionalizes both formal and informal conversations with underrepresented school constituencies in order to better understand how they experience the school's culture.
- The effectiveness of a school's diversity efforts is regularly evaluated. The *Assessment of Inclusivity and Multiculturalism*, available from the National Association of Independent Schools, is an excellent resource for this purpose.

## DIVERSITY AND PARENTS

- The school regularly communicates to parents its commitment to diversity, beginning in the admission process.
- Parents understand and support the school's commitment to diversity.
- The leadership of the Parent Association reflects the diversity of the parent body, and Parent Association events are welcoming to parents of all backgrounds.
- Parent leaders receive diversity training, which is also made available to the entire parent body.

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AIMS calls on its schools to focus their considerable resources of energy, talent, and money in this critical area, as they have in so many others in the past. On behalf of this generation and all future generations of students, it is now time for AIMS schools to have the courage, the determination, and the vision to take whatever steps necessary to greatly strengthen diversity practice and to ensure thereby not only institutional success, but more importantly, a better world.



*The Association of Independent Maryland & DC Schools (AIMS) is an association of about 120 independent, college preparatory schools in Maryland and the District of Columbia, representing more than 40,000 students and more than 5,000 teachers, administrators, and staff. It was organized in 1967. AIMS works in cooperation with the Maryland State Department of Education and is a member of the Maryland chapter of the Council for American Private Education and the National Association of Independent Schools.*