

## **RESULTS FROM THE ALMA PARTNERS AUDIT REPORT PRESENTED: MAY, 2024**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

It has been our pleasure to work with the Waldorf School of San Diego community on a diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and belonging (DEIJB) audit over the past several months. Your community shared a wealth of important information through this process, and we deeply appreciate everyone's input. Our audit process is described in detail on pages 4-10. All qualitative data has been summarized to maintain confidentiality.

The heart of the Audit Report is comprised of 28 recommendations: six under Curriculum, eight under Community Life, and 14 under Policies and Procedures. Three are classified as immediate priorities, and 13 as high priorities. All 28 recommendations are elaborated on in the "recommendations" sections that come later in the report. Our feedback aims to help you bridge divides, develop leaders, align school policies with established best practices, reach out more broadly into the City Heights community, continue to deepen your roots, and better serve all in your school community.

Through this process, we were able to identify several key themes:

- 1) Communication, follow-through, trust in leadership, policy improvements, and outreach on the part of the school are key areas for attention.
- 2) Important work is being done in the DEIJB realm. Representation of diverse groups (on faculty, staff, Board, in the student/family community, and in curriculum and festivals) is important to most people who spoke with us or responded to our surveys.
- 3) Data indicated some painful, acrimonious polarization between those in the school who are committed to DEIJB work and those who struggle to understand why it matters, or disagree that it's important.

We want to emphasize that the recommendations in the audit require ongoing work and will take time and resources to implement. The team we recommend identifying, as an immediate priority, will be responsible for ensuring integration of our recommendations into your strategic planning for the coming months and years. We have sketched out a map for you; the school may need three to five years or more to clarify and reach your destination. We encourage you to take time in the coming weeks to read this report completely and review and discuss all recommendations and supporting data as you plan next steps.

### **COMMENDATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS: CURRICULUM**

#### **COMMENDATIONS**

1. Positive rapport is cultivated between teachers and students. On the site visit and in survey data, we noticed and heard about multiple ways that teachers show interest in students and interact with students in ways that demonstrate respect and warmth.

2. Many teachers are dedicated to inclusive practices and curriculum. We understand that faculty meetings include time to review and update the curriculum through a DEIJB lens in a systematic way. Survey respondents stated that the school is making strides in the realm of inclusive curriculum. Our site visitor noticed inclusive imagery and gender-neutral language being used. (Ex: teachers calling students “friends” or having students refer to the guest as “visitor”)

3. Some systems are in place to support neurodiverse students. Examples we heard about include the Care Team and educational support services, the Educational Support Plan, and working with outside referrals such as Kids on the Point and/or Occupational Therapists.

4. Deep community connection is fostered by the community service elective.

5. Students take the four-week Social Justice Seminar, and Social Justice Elective is an option for high school students.

6. The school has put energy into re-envisioning festivals.

7. The school engages in a practice of getting feedback from departing seniors through the verse-giving ceremony.

8. The High School seems to be addressing DEIJB questions openly and directly, as a faculty and with students.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. HIGH PRIORITY: Continue to dedicate time to developing inclusive curriculum.**

Survey data and focus group feedback highlighted the need to maintain focus on diversifying and contextualizing curriculum. From ensuring that history and culture are not taught from a Eurocentric perspective (ex: share place-based, locally relevant Indigenous stories alongside traditional Waldorf curricular elements like the Norse myths) to bringing in more gender-neutral examples in stories (ex: using they/them pronouns for animals rather than he/she), it is important that all students are offered “windows and mirrors” through which they can learn about other cultures and ways of being while also seeing themselves reflected. We recommend continuing to work on curriculum updates in small groups in faculty meetings, and to continue to nurture the school’s relationship with Queer Sol Collective.

Resources:

Decolonizing Your Curriculum

Start Here, Start Now by Liz Kleinrock

Social Justice Standards by Learning for Justice

### **2. HIGH PRIORITY: Update book selection in the libraries.**

We understand that at the top of the school’s list of priorities for obtaining grants is securing money to fund updates to the pedagogical/curricular libraries and student library books. We encourage continuing with these efforts.

### **3. PRIORITY: Increase assistance for neurodiverse students.**

Make sure teachers from conventional as well as anthroposophical backgrounds are informed of and actively implementing best practices for working with neurodiverse students. Specific recommendations include:

- a) Schedule additional professional development with outside resources such as Kids on the Point
- b) Develop tools to support for students with post-traumatic stress (PTS)
- c) Actively collaborate with the Occupational Therapist the school recommends to parents
- d) Attend to how physical spaces are arranged and whether they meet the needs of students with sensory sensitivities (ex: seating, lighting, acoustics, soft spaces, etc)
- e) Consider how a team of people, including a Remedial/Developmental Specialist, Occupational Therapist, specialists who focus on dyslexia, Extra Lesson teacher, and anthroposophical doctor could work together to create plans and/or observe and support students.

Resources:

Affirming Neurodiversity in Therapy and Education  
Neurodiversity and Buildings Checklist

#### **4. PRIORITY: Strengthen support for English language learners (ELL) students.**

Focus group data and our site visit indicated a need to support ELL students in a more formal way. We recommend developing a simple spreadsheet or other mechanism to identify the number of, and needs of, ELL students in the school. The school should also ensure that support for ELL students is included in the annual budget. Ensuring that ELL services are in place may increase the school's ability to attract more families whose first language isn't English, increasing the cultural and linguistic richness of the community.

Resource: 6 Essential Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners

#### **5. PRIORITY: Offer additional opportunities for students to connect with the City Heights neighborhood and community, building on existing work and taking inspiration from the high school.**

Recommendations include:

- 1) Collaborate more with Marshall Elementary, the IRC, and community organizations like New Roots Garden, and the local library
- 2) Participate in local events and community engagement projects
- 3) Develop authentic, reciprocal relationships with local and regional organizations and communities

#### **6. Collaborate to continually refresh festival life.**

We consider festival life part of the curriculum, as it speaks to the culture and values of the school and is often woven into student work in the classroom. As the school continues to engage in the process of updating your festival life, we recommend taking into account the specific roles and needs your festivals (and their components) fill. As the school removes aspects of your festivals, it is necessary to actively fill the gaps with new meaningful material, taking the local neighborhood and communities as inspiration. Festival life should offer a balance between traditional Waldorf celebrations that are meaningful to the community, and new or updated festivals that are important to families and employees currently in the school and offer students windows and mirrors, as noted earlier.

Resource:  
Annual Festivals in Multi-Religious or Non-Christian Waldorf Schools by Vera Hoffmann

## **COMMENDATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS: COMMUNITY LIFE**

### **COMMENDATIONS**

1. The school has published an Adult Code of Conduct that includes two flowcharts to help streamline and support communications and a thorough "Conflict Resolution" section.
2. We saw inclusive imagery in the school hallways (Lower School and High School).
3. The school is assisting Spanish-speaking families in innovative ways.  
(For example, compensating assistant teachers who are fluent Spanish speakers to serve as interpreters/ translators.)
4. Work has been done in the High School (and to some extent in the Lower School) to support LGBTQ+ students. Examples include the founding of a Genders & Sexualities Alliance (GSA), hosting speakers for Gender Justice Day, connecting with the Queer Sol Collective, and having all-gender bathrooms and changing rooms in the High School.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**1. IMMEDIATE PRIORITY: Attend to creating a school culture of belonging, inclusion, safety, and accountability, prioritizing the well-being of all students, families, and colleagues over the comfort of any individual or small group.** Several focus group and survey responses pointed to division in the community, lack of cohesive implementation of DEIJB commitments, and a critical lack of trust in (and ability to define what constitutes) school leadership.

Here is a relevant excerpt from the school's Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity page on the website that could be a starting point for DEIJB communications and agreements: "We know we have far to go as individuals, a school, and a community in our understanding of racial oppression and social justice, and in transforming ourselves, our biases, and our systems. We are striving to do better; to transform education and support the growth and development of the children in our care."

Sub-recommendations include:

- a) Make responding honestly to feedback from students and families on DEIJB and other concerns a priority over protecting the status quo.
- b) Develop shared community aspirations and use these to hold everyone in the school community, including the students, accountable and responsible to values of kindness and inclusion for all. Interviews and review of survey data revealed that many incidents of bias and bullying have gone uninterrupted and unaddressed. Lack of bias intervention affirms harmful interpersonal behavior as part of the school's culture.
- c) Build school culture intentionally by responding to feedback and interrupting discriminatory jokes, statements, and stereotypes among students, using them as learning opportunities and teaching tools for growth and community healing.

Resources:  
Design for Belonging: How to Build Inclusion and Collaboration in Your Communities

**2. HIGH PRIORITY: Clarify governance structure and improve communication.**

Many people stated strongly that the school lacks leadership and clear processes, and this causes deep mistrust and a great deal of frustration. (See Appendix for verbatims from the surveys and focus groups.)

Despite the commendable clarity and organizational flowcharts in the Adult Code of Conduct, many people said they don't really know where their grievances or requests for support go when they are brought forward, or if there will be follow-through. Respondents also expressed a sense that what is described on paper is not supported by actual systems, and that existing systems don't prevent retaliation and backlash from taking place.

The EID Committee has recently come out with a Community Concern Form, but will need guidance and collaboration as they roll it out. (See related recommendation under "Policies and Procedures", page 38.)

**3. HIGH PRIORITY: Engage in community-wide learning to heal rifts and build shared language and practical skills.**

a) Work with students on implicit bias, microaggressions, and bystander intervention skills. Hold optional affinity groups for students, engaging in racial identity work, analysis around socio-economic status, and LGBTQ+ identity and allyship, led by experienced facilitators. In facilitating these conversations, unpack interpersonal social identity dynamics and develop student skill and compassion with each other, building respect for and appreciation of diversity.

b) Offer required, ongoing professional development workshops for faculty/staff (optional for families) on implicit bias and other DEIJB topics, particularly related to race, socio-economic status, LGBTQ+ identities, and supporting ELL and neurodiverse students. Survey data strongly supported annual DEIJB training for all faculty/staff. (Favored by 88% of Faculty/Staff/Board)

c) Consider mediated restorative justice work to rebuild relationships among faculty and between school leadership and families, and address a perceived culture of bullying, favoritism, and exclusion in the community, between adults, between students, and between adults and students. SEEDS is an excellent resource, Alma Partners offers mediation and conflict resolution, and Pollack Peacebuilding Systems is just one local organization offering tools and workshops.

**4. PRIORITY: Prioritize the retention of community members (faculty, staff, and families), especially those from marginalized or non-dominant backgrounds.**

To understand why attrition happens, conduct exit interviews using a form that integrates established best practices or is vetted by a consultant with DEIJB experience. Create a multi-year retention plan based on data collected in exit interviews. Recognize how much self-advocacy is required of non-dominant members of the community (mentioned in multiple contexts) and how continually having to self-advocate might be burning out some families. Attend to the varied needs of multiple family systems, including those that are non-dominant in the community.

**5. PRIORITY: Offer additional support to the ELL and Spanish-speaking community in the school (students and families).**

Areas of focus should include translation of key documents and signage into multiple languages, and increased interpretation at events and parent meetings as needed.

**6. PRIORITY: Provide more support for LGBTQ+ students.**

LGBTQ+ students are asking to be better represented in the sex ed curriculum. In the Middle School, there is a request for teachers to be more inclusive, for a GSA to be founded, and for all-gender bathrooms to be made available. On single-stall bathrooms that can easily be made all-gender, consider changing the signs from a male/female sign to one that says “all-gender.” Multiple people mentioned the need for more resolve on the school’s part in this area.

Resources:

Respect for All: GLSEN Policy Recommendations Gender Spectrum

**7. Enliven the Parent Enrichment Program (PEP) and find additional ways to connect with the local community.**

Survey data indicated a need to involve families as the PEP is designed each year, to be sure events are relevant and compelling. Festivals (inviting neighbors and the wider community into the school) and community engagement (going out into the community) are good opportunities. We understand that some festivals are open to the wider community, but they don’t necessarily feel accessible. (For example, focus groups said that products sold at the events can be expensive. In particular, we heard that the Winter Faire has started to feel more commercial and less community-oriented.)

**8. Improve the physical accessibility of the school.**

Include an optional question on application forms, asking about specific accessibility needs of prospective students and families. Consider other aspects of ADA compliance, like ramps, elevators, and automatic sinks and doors. We noted that multiple classrooms are only accessible via stairs. While the school does make an effort to move classrooms to make them accessible for specific families, it is important to work toward being a fully accessible campus.

Resource: ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities

**COMMENDATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS: POLICIES & PROCEDURES**

**COMMENDATIONS**

1. 81% of Faculty/Staff/Board said the school has provided sufficient anti-bias and other DEIJB training to all employees.

(See recommendations related to the above, on the following pages. Also note that identity data was not collected in the Faculty/Staff/Board survey; therefore Alma Partners is unable to offer an analysis of the diversity of this group of respondents and the way that their identities may impact their responses.)

2. The EID Committee recently created and published a Community Concern Form to enable community members to report incidents related to equity, inclusion and belonging. (See related recommendation, page 38.)

3. The High School Student Handbook is thorough and accessible, shares the goal of the High School and expected schoolwide learning results, has the Morning Verse in English and Spanish, includes helpful information on student support and mentors, centers respect for others in the “Conduct” section, articulates an overnight policy that allows for flexible chaperoned sleeping arrangements in some situations, prioritizes restorative justice in the “Conflict Resolution” section, and states the following regarding the Dress Code:

“The above dress code is non-gender specific and will be enforced in a way that does not unfairly infringe upon particular genders, sexual orientations, gender presentations or performances, body-type, or any other individualized aspects.”

4. The Grades Parent Handbook is thorough, accessible, has a contemporary stance regarding dress code, prioritizes cooperation and collaboration in the “Code of Conduct” section, and clearly articulates school mission, values, governance structure, policies, and procedures.

5. The school’s bylaws (approved in 2015, amended in 2024) mandate inclusion of faculty and an EID Committee member on the Board

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **1. IMMEDIATE PRIORITY: Identify and empower the team responsible for implementing the recommendations in this report.**

Without a group that has a clear understanding of how DEIJB initiatives align with the school’s stated intentions and established best practices in schools, the work will inevitably stall. This group should be given dedicated time to plan and track how this Audit Report will drive action and continue meeting until the school has identified or hired a staff person responsible for carrying DEIJB work throughout the school.

We recommend that the group use this resource as a foundational orientation to inform planning: *NAIS Principles of Good Practice: Equity and Justice*. This document lays out a clear rationale and action steps for DEIJB work in the school community and beyond. The team responsible for implementing the recommendations in this Audit Report should become familiar with it and refer back to it in conversations with the community to clarify and animate the school’s stated intentions and meet professional benchmarks.

### **2. IMMEDIATE PRIORITY: Develop a plan to ensure that disciplinary policies are administered equitably. (Focusing on the experience of Black students, specifically)**

### **3. HIGH PRIORITY: Ensure required annual anti-bias and other DEIJB training for all employees.** (Noted earlier under “Community Life”; favored by 88% of Faculty/Staff/Board)

Existing DEIJB training has been supportive, but it has not yet translated into:

- a broadly communicated or well-understood school stance on DEIJB, aligned with school mission
- the development of policies and procedures that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion and reduce incidents of bias
- or a feeling of confidence (among any group surveyed) that the school is preparing students to navigate a diverse society or that school leadership can improve



diversity, equity, and inclusion within the school.

**4. HIGH PRIORITY: Offer age-appropriate anti-bias and DEIJB training/coursework to students annually.**

(Favored by 88% of Faculty/Staff/Board)

In addition to supporting teachers to integrate the concepts into existing classes, we suggest that the school continue to activate student-driven leadership through facilitated conversations, hosting a Student Leadership Conference (SLC) offered by Alma Partners (for grades 6 and up) and/or supporting student participation in the NAIS Student Diversity Leadership Conference, and visiting and collaborating with other schools.

Resources: Common Sense Education: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resources for Classrooms and topic recommendations on page 26

**5. HIGH PRIORITY: Provide support and structure for the rollout of the Community Concern Form and response procedure.**

We understand the form was shared with the community in April. Additional steps should include:

- a) Remind all community members periodically where to find the form.
- b) Offer a workshop for faculty/staff to roll out the protocol connected to the form. The workshop should include hands-on work with specific scenarios to help faculty/staff understand how to integrate learning and practice skills and should remind them how they and others can access the form.
- c) Track incidents on a confidential spreadsheet accessible only to designated EID Committee members, who are responsible for sharing trends quarterly with school leadership and faculty/staff.
- d) Update the employee Incident Report form and Adult Code of Conduct document to align them with the Community Concern form and process. In the Incident Report, clarify introductory language, offer the option of an in-person meeting, and reframe the entire document to orient it toward repair and restoration of relationship.

**6. HIGH PRIORITY: Develop policies to increase diversity of non-Board school leadership (Administration and PG) and faculty/staff, and improve retention of employees from non-dominant groups.** (See separate recommendation about Board diversity on page 41.)

We heard from all constituencies that representation in Administrative leadership and faculty/staff is important to them and is an area critically in need of attention.

Relevant survey responses:

"I have confidence in the ability of leadership to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion within the school."

Alum: Slider score: 51/100

Faculty/Staff/Board: Slider score: 64/100

Parent/Caregiver: Slider score: 57/100

"I believe school leadership takes appropriate action in response to overt and subtle incidents of discrimination."

Alum survey: Slider score: 48/100

Faculty/Staff/Board: Slider score: 65/100



Parents/Caregivers: Slider score: 60/100

Faculty/Staff/Board survey:

“When I speak up at school, I feel that my opinion is valued by leadership.”

Slider score: 61/100

Resources:

NAIS Principles of Good Practice: Hiring Process

Retaining Teachers of Color at Predominantly White Schools

### **7. HIGH PRIORITY: Develop a plan to increase recruitment and retention of Board members from diverse backgrounds.**

In survey data, we noted a low positive response to questions asking how well the Board recruits and retains diverse Board members, as well as a gap between how Faculty/Staff/Board and parents/caregivers see the Board (more positively) vs. how alum and alum families see the Board (less positively).

For example:

In response to the question, “The school makes a consistent effort to retain people from diverse backgrounds”, survey responses were as follows in relation to the Board:

Faculty/Staff/Board respondents: only 58% said yes

(relevant responses cont. on next page)

In response to the question, “The school makes a consistent effort to retain people from diverse backgrounds”, survey responses were as follows in relation to the Board:

Alum survey: only 32% said yes

Faculty/Staff/Board: 70% said yes (note discrepancy to alum response)

Parent/caregiver responses to the survey indicated lower confidence in the school’s ability to recruit and retain diverse Board members than in the school’s ability to recruit and retain students/families and employees from diverse groups, though the issue needs attention across all groups.

Resource: How to Attract and Retain Diversity on Nonprofit Boards

### **8. HIGH PRIORITY: Clarify and communicate the mandate, role, and membership process of the EID Committee.**

Survey data and focus group data indicated a lack of concrete roles or authority carried by the EID Committee, as well as some concerns about its exclusivity, process, and transparency.

Resource: Best Practices for Effective DEI Committees

**9. HIGH PRIORITY: Create an onboarding checklist for new faculty, assistants, and hourly employees.** Community feedback indicated that the onboarding process is inconsistent and not well-defined and recommend creating an onboarding checklist that outlines all steps in the process to ensure each new employee is given the same information.

### **10. HIGH PRIORITY: Develop a more equitable salary structure.**

Community feedback indicated that the current structure “fosters inequality and creates resentment.” We recommend that the school:

- Offer defined salaries for specific positions, with a salary range based on experience.
- Take into account education and experience not directly related to the position.
- Incentivize professional development.

(cont. on next page)

High priority sub-recommendation:

Review, clearly document, and consistently follow personnel processes with regard to salaries, promotions, and evaluation.

Transparency and equity are crucial. Survey data points to unclear processes that some feel protect, favor, and/or prioritize certain individuals over others.

Resources:

Teacher Compensation Strategies

US EEOC Guide: How to Prevent Race and Color Discrimination

Bamboo HR Guide: 9 Best Practices

### **11. HIGH PRIORITY: Align Tuition Adjustment practices with established best practices.**

The Tuition Adjustment Committee (TAC) needs support to further develop and implement DEIJB-informed language and systems. We recommend:

- That the TAC adds optional identity questions on the TA application
- That the TAC engages with the resources below, some of which were recently shared with the group
- That the TA Liaison (and any TAC member who interacts with families) receive additional DEIJB training, such as those listed below

(cont. on next page)

Resources:

Best Practices Overview: Tuition Assistance, Alma Partners

NAIS Principles of Good Practice: Financial Aid Administration

Historically marginalized communities definition (requested by the TAC)

What does marginalized mean and why does it matter?

Trainings:

Undoing Racism workshop with the People's Institute for Survival & Beyond (online, offered frequently)

The Race Institute for K-12 Educators (in person, August 2024)

Fulfilling Our Promise: Becoming Inclusive Waldorf Communities, online with Alma Partners (begins in September 2024: register at [almapartners.net/public-programming](https://almapartners.net/public-programming))

### **12. Update the Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity page on the website, at least quarterly.**

The information currently on the page is at least two years old and links to a site featuring the MLK Assembly in the 2020-21 school year.

### **13. Align Human Resources (HR) forms with school voice and branding.**

The Exit Interview form and Incident Report form appear to have been created from templates and are not aligned with other school documents (ex: use of "company" rather than "school", no school logo, etc.)

### **14. Update language in application forms for consistency and inclusivity.**

Inclusive elements of the applications include using the term "parents/guardians," the normalization of having multiple households, clear questions about specific accommodations and special needs, and asking for the personal pronouns of the children in the grades and HS applications. Areas that can use improvement include:

- Using gender-neutral language when referencing the child and their siblings. Some examples:
  - "Brothers and sisters" → "siblings"

- “his/her” → “their”
- “Son or daughter” → “child”
- Ask for the personal pronouns of the parents/guardians (optional response)
- Remove overly personal questions such as:
  - Pregnancy and birth history
  - Child's bathroom habits
- Replace “What is the overall view of your life since your child was born” with “What are the major events that have taken place in your life since your child was born?”