

Dear parents and community members,

As we get ready to begin another wonderful school year, we are excited to take a moment to share with you the results from the Assessment of Inclusivity and Multiculturalism (AIM). We wrapped up the AIM process last year by hosting a series of group conversations amongst parents, faculty and staff, board members and 8th grade students regarding various areas of school life. As a committee, we took time to do a deep review of the results both from the group conversations ("discovery group meetings") and from the climate survey in which many of you participated in Spring 2016.

We found that the concerns raised were often shared across constituent groups, and they fell into four broad categories:

1. desire for greater racial, cultural, socio-economic, religious and gender diversity within the school;
2. eagerness to see school curriculum better reflect human diversity and address more specifically the pressing current issues of racism and inequity;
3. sharing of barriers created by socio-economic differences; and
4. critiques of school communication, or lack thereof, around decision-making processes, individual concerns, and current issues.

As we worked to identify areas of concern, beginning last year with the results from the climate survey, we initiated conversations and began implementing some initial responses. These included: teacher and staff training around race, equity, and inclusivity; efforts to increase socio-economic support for those who need it; a project to increase multicultural and equity-focused curriculum materials; and more. Read on for a more in-depth report on the process, the results, and a look at the ways we are working to address the areas for growth identified in this AIM process.



Introduction and Process

Last Spring, City of Lakes parents, employees, board members, students and alumni completed the Assessment of Inclusivity and Multiculturalism (AIM) Climate Survey. Based on an initial reading of responses to that survey, the AIM steering committee identified these five areas of focus:

1. Grow City of Lakes' capacity and ability to work well with individual differences, especially differences in physical ability, socioeconomic status, race and/or ethnicity, gender identity, and religion.
2. Increase the diversity of our faculty, staff, and board of trustees to better reflect the diversity found within our student body and the wider urban community.
3. Increase financial and social access to City of Lakes, so we can welcome a wider array of families into our school community.
4. Grow the extent to which diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusivity is embedded within our school culture, including in our curriculum, school policies, festival life, class plays and projects, the physical environment, and all school communications.

5. Make visible our actions and increase communications around diversity, inclusivity, and multiculturalism, so that parents, students, trustees, and others are informed about what efforts we are making, and what actions we are taking.

Since then we have had the opportunity to thoroughly review the many thoughtful written responses to the climate survey, as well as to complete the second half of the assessment by hosting multiple “discovery committee” meetings comprised of different constituent groups. These groups of 5-10 discussed and provided feedback based on a list of questions, provided by the AIM Self-Study Guide. From the sum of these, we would like to share with you the following themes, including strengths and challenges expressed by multiple sources, as well as some individual concerns that we feel are important to acknowledge. We would also like to share with you actions we have already taken to address some of these challenges, other actions in process, and our goals for future growth.

Participants

Climate Survey:

150 Parents/Guardians

45 Faculty/Staff/Admin (33 faculty, 7 staff, 5 admin)

11 Trustees

24 Students

8 Alumnae

Discovery Groups:

2 Parent/Guardian groups (3 participants each?)

Board of Trustees: two sessions

Faculty/Staff: one session

College: three sessions

Admin: two sessions

8. Grade Students: one session

Results/Themes

The following positive aspects were noted by multiple sources:

- Good morale; teachers affirm students and encourage joy in learning.
- Openness; school’s willingness to acknowledge and seek to address lack of diversity.
- Location; City of Lakes is located in a lively, culturally rich and diverse neighborhood.
- Multiculturalism celebrated in plays, songs, stories and festivals.
- Freedom and flexibility of curriculum; curriculum grows out of a universal understanding of what it means to be human and is based on a profound reverence for all of life.
- Idealism among parent body.
- Students feel they are treated equally.

The following areas of concern were voiced by multiple sources:

1. Though the city and neighborhood are very diverse, City of Lakes does not reflect that diversity to an equal degree.
 - Students of color do not see themselves reflected adequately in faculty/staff.
 - LGBTQ students do not see themselves reflected adequately in faculty/staff.
 - Families who do not fit into the predominantly white, straight, middle class, nuclear family majority can struggle to feel like they belong.

- Environment does not fully reflect the diverse and inclusive community we seek to create.
 - Recitation of verses or songs that contain references to “God” is not inclusive of the varied religious and nonreligious school community.
 - Lack of physical accessibility; to City of Lakes school building for those with mobility issues, and to school events and festivals held at the church across the street.
2. Curriculum/Pedagogy
- Concerns that the Waldorf pedagogical practice of teaching implicitly about important issues through stories of justice/injustice etc, to elementary age students fails to adequately prepare students to meet real-world issues of inequity, racism, homophobia, and more.
 - Curriculum includes learning about cultures around the world, but less about local diverse cultures and movements.
 - Student-voiced concern about cultural appropriation related to portrayals of indigenous cultures in class plays.
3. Socio-economic differences can lead to exclusion, feelings of separateness
- Single parents and/or working parents have difficulty participating fully, attending parents meetings, and volunteering in the classroom or attending field trips.
 - Students may lack ability to participate fully in ensemble program (due to lack of funds for private lessons and instrument rental), sports program (due to lack of transportation), and more.
 - Tuition assistance process feels burdensome and is lacking in transparency.
4. Communication critiques
- Lack of transparency in school communications around decision-making processes.
 - Administration and faculty are reluctant to address difficult topics, or hold ‘courageous conversations’ with families and students.
 - Lack of clarity about avenues of communication

Responses/Actions

City of Lakes has already taken a number of steps which address the concerns and issues raised in the AIM process, and is currently working on other actions in response to these concerns:

1. Taking steps to eliminate socio-economic barriers:
 - Incorporated supply fee and field trip expenses into the tuition so that families qualifying for TA receive financial assistance with those previously additional expenses.
 - Increased effort to provide buses for many field trips so as to be less reliant on parents for field trip support.
 - Increased financial aid for qualifying families in support of CLWS’ diversity goals.
 - Working on a proposal to broaden financial assistance to include more school-related expenses, such as instrument rental, private music lessons and aftercare.
2. Installing new access system at north entrance door to ease access to school building

for those with less mobility.

3. Acknowledging diversity as a priority when hiring faculty/staff.
4. Diversity Committee and teaching faculty collaborating to create a collection of multicultural and equity-focused curriculum resources to broaden typically used teaching material and archive it for access by all future teachers.
5. Sending two staff members to SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) leadership training, summer 2017; this program trains community representatives in leading/facilitating important conversations around equity and diversity.
6. Faculty, staff, and board took part in a number of trainings and/or conversations around issues of equity during the 2016-17 school year:
 - Penumbra Theater workshop on race [all faculty/staff/admin]
 - Biography work around inclusivity [all faculty/staff/admin]
 - Group readings and conversations about socio-economic inequities and white privilege [all faculty/staff/admin, college of teachers, board of trustees]
 - “Increasing Engagement Through Absent Narratives” workshop at MN Humanities Center [5 faculty/staff/admin]
 - Understanding Privilege workshop at YWCA [5 faculty/staff]

Conclusion

The AIM results give us a snapshot of the climate of inclusivity at City of Lakes; by no means are they a comprehensive analysis. They have, however, provided us with valuable feedback and direction in our ongoing work to support and grow the equity, inclusivity, and diversity of the school. Additionally, they provide a benchmark against which we can measure our progress if we repeat the AIM process, as recommended, in five years time.

In the meanwhile, we continue to welcome your ongoing feedback related to this process, our conclusions, or any of the initiatives we have mentioned here. We will strive to update the school community regularly on these initiatives and our future diversity and equity endeavors in this upcoming school year.