

**Redwood Day School**  
**Strategic Plan for Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Community**

October 10, 2009

**Introduction**

In the business world over the last twenty-five years, a dramatic shift in the definition of “good business” has occurred. It became increasingly clear to mainstream organizations that in order to be able to compete in a global economy and to utilize the changing demographics in the US they had to “diversify” their employees. That is, they had to recruit and retain more people who were different by race and by gender in order to create and maintain an effective and growth-producing environment in their organizations.

Similarly, though more slowly, educational institutions—public and private, K-12, undergraduate and graduate—have made some of the same shifts in understanding. For years, schools, and other types of organizations for that matter, talked about “diversity” because it sounded like the right thing to do. Most institutions want to see themselves as fair, offering an “equal opportunity” for employment and education to people from a cross section of races and ethnicities.

In the last fifteen years it has become clear, through a large body of research and a Supreme Court decision<sup>1</sup>, that bringing together a broad range of students, particularly racially, is not only the right thing to do but also the wise thing to do. Students who are educated in environments where there is a broad diversity of students, faculty, and staff, and where that diversity is valued and utilized, learn how to work with and value people whose experiences are very different from their own. They are better able to take on someone else’s perspective, and they are more likely to look for multiple solutions to a problem rather than just adopting the first one they come to. Further, they develop a greater sense of empathy for others, they solve problems more creatively than they do in more homogeneous settings, and they make different decisions based on a greater variety of values represented in the group. One of the most important possibilities, in a genuinely and whole-heartedly diverse school, is that learners can

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<sup>1</sup> Grutter v. Bollinger, 539 US 306 (2003). This is the University of Michigan Law School case in which the law school posited that creating racially diverse classes by having intentional racial diversity as part of the admissions process produced people who were better lawyers and who “lawyered differently.” The Supreme Court concurred.

develop the ability to have difficult and authentic conversations across differences. Nationally, educational “excellence” is being redefined.

The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), of which RDS is a member, has also been involved in that redefinition. In 1987, NAIS hosted the first People of Color Conference for independent schools. Although initially focusing on raising the *numbers* of students and faculty of color at schools, since that time, NAIS has taken two major turns. First, it began exploring ways to change the *climate* of learning institutions so that they became more hospitable to people of color, thus increasing their retention at the schools. Second, it began to broaden the definition of a “diverse” school community to include gender, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, ability, religion, and so on.

Redwood Day School has also worked for years to make “diversity”<sup>2</sup> a reality. The goal of a diverse community has long been integral to Redwood Day School’s mission. The School has been intentional in increasing the number of students, staff, and faculty of color and in creating a rich curriculum that reflects the diversity of families in the School and in the broader community. We are made up of many different people with qualities that differ from our own. Redwood Day School specifically places a value on diversity to help us reach our goal of creating a community where all members feel respected, knowing that these unique differences help us to strengthen who we are and allow all members to flourish.

To provide a concrete foundation for reaching its goal of a diverse community as well as identifying where it is currently, Redwood Day School hired consultant Francie Kendall in the fall of 2007. Her stated task was to assess the School’s climate and help create a strategic plan for diversity. In the spring of 2008, a diversity climate assessment was conducted at Redwood Day School. Following that, a committee was formed to develop a strategic plan for creating a diverse and inclusive community.

One of the purposes of an organizational strategic plan is to provide a map for how the organization will get to where it says it wants to go. Generally speaking, such a plan reflects the stated goals of the organization’s mission and vision and supports reaching the institution’s stated goals in an identified time frame. This document is the first draft of that plan for Redwood Day School. In consultation with Francie Kendall, this plan has been written by six members of the RDS staff —Denise

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<sup>2</sup> We are defining “diversity” as creating an inclusive environment where all members are valued and validated for who they are and the gifts they bring because of who they are. Included in this definition are differences of race and ethnicity, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation and gender expression, ability, religion, and different ways of learning. This list is meant to be encompassing but not exclusionary.

Breland, Lower School Director; Lisa Horner, Middle School teacher; Tontra Love, Lower School teacher; Warren Sepkowitz, Middle School Director; Jeanne Coyne Song, Middle School Coordinator; and Ray Wilson, Upper School Director. The group has met for many hours, striving to create the bones of a plan that will help guide the School as it becomes fully inclusive. The goal in sharing it with you now is to invite your comments and feedback; your responses will be addressed in the final version of the plan.

As a framework for creating the plan, the committee defined “diversity” as “creating an inclusive environment where all members are valued and validated for who they are and the gifts they bring because of who they are.” It is widely believed<sup>3</sup> that becoming genuinely inclusive requires that people in the dominant cultures examine their own privilege and access gained, in part, because of the social identity groups of which they are a part. Understanding and addressing the disparities in experiences at the School is critical to the success of this plan. Included in the committee’s definition are differences of race and ethnicity, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation and gender expression, ability, religion, and different ways of learning. This list is meant to be encompassing but not exclusionary.

The group identified five “critical issues” to focus on: communication; recruitment and admissions; student, faculty and staff retention; curriculum; and school climate and culture. People who were involved in interviews and focus groups during the climate assessment mentioned each issue frequently. For each issue the committee reviewed the recommendations in the assessment and created objectives designed to address the comments, concerns, and recommendations. The objectives were divided into categories of “Assessment,” “Increase Skills and Knowledge,” “Implementation,” and “Ongoing Evaluation.”

This draft document includes goals and objectives that would help RDS move forward in its goal of an “intimate diverse community.” Committee members believe that that it will be most helpful, initially, for the community to look at the broad structure of the plan rather than focusing on specific actions. The short-term and long-term action plans for these objectives will be created following the community’s review of this draft. Once the final version of our plan is completed, we will have the big picture of how we envision our school community, as well as an initial group of specific operational tasks to support our journey towards this goal.

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<sup>3</sup> See the following: a) Fall 2007 *Independent School*, “School Culture and Climate,” b) *Association of Independent Schools in New England*, “From Assimilation to Inclusion: How White Educators and Educators of Color Can Make Diversity Work,” c) *Association of Independent Schools in New England*, “Hiring and Retaining Teachers of Color: The Why and How of It,” d) *Association of Independent Schools in New England*, “Thinking in Independent Schools: An AISNE Guide for Educators of Color.”

*Diversity-- creating an inclusive environment where all members are valued and validated for who they are and what they bring.*

### **Critical Issue: The development and maintenance of an inclusive climate.**

To borrow from the *American School Board Journal*, December 2005, “Some educators use the terms ‘climate’ and ‘culture’ interchangeably, but researchers in the field say there is an important difference between the two. How students and staff members feel about their school is climate. *Why* they feel the way they do is determined by culture--by the values and behavior of those in the school.”

#### **1. Assessment**

- a. Carry out school climate assessment (completed in the spring of 2008)
- b. Develop procedures to do ongoing assessment of the climate and culture of the School.

#### **2. Increase knowledge and skills**

##### a. Administration

- i. Intentionally provide opportunities for all employees to learn about how race, gender and gender expression, sexual orientation, ability, religion, socioeconomic class, and different ways of learning that affect the climate of the School.
- ii. Research more comprehensive ways that language can reflect our belief that all people are equally valuable. Intentionally include that language in all ways that we communicate that belief throughout the School, e.g., hallway bulletin boards, Friday Folder newsletter, displays in the Gallery, and so on.
- iii. Broaden professional development to ensure that authentic respect for others, their beliefs and their life experiences are highlighted, e.g., looking at how one’s biases are reflected in curricula, addressing issues of class, and so on.
- iv. Continue to intentionally develop leadership skills that work toward a common goal of a collaborative work ethic.
- v. Continue to provide training for employees on issues related to transgender and gender expression, i.e., Ally Action for in-service training.
- vi. Practice and model listening to others in ways that demonstrate genuine interest in what they are saying.

##### b. Teachers

- i. Continue to create ways to include socioeconomic issues in classroom conversations, e.g., looking at the impact of class-based language and the assumptions based on class, for example, moving from “where did you go on vacation?” to “what have you done since the last time I saw you?”
- ii. Enhance authentic respect for others and their beliefs and their life experiences through professional development.
- iii. Practice and model listening to others in ways that demonstrate genuine interest in what they are saying.

##### c. Staff

- i. Continue to demonstrate authentic respect for visitors and members of the community.
- ii. Practice and model listening to others in ways that demonstrate genuine interest in what they are saying.

- iii. Enhance understanding of their role in maintaining a welcoming atmosphere.
- d. Students
  - i. Continue to create authentic respect for others, their beliefs and their life experiences through multiple venues: advisory, guest speakers, curriculum, assemblies, etc.
  - ii. Continue to teach students that everyone should feel validated and seen/heard and can bring their whole selves to school.

### **3. Implementation**

- a. Apply the skills and knowledge gathered in professional development experiences in daily interactions so that the climate of the School becomes increasingly welcoming to a diverse population of employees and families.
- b. Create professional development plans for every teacher, administrator and staff member that increase skills and abilities to engage in an inclusive community, e.g., participating in and facilitating age-appropriate discussions of difficult topics.
- c. Continue to move from a conflict-averse norm to seeing conflict as a vehicle for transformation, e.g., moving away from “let’s just say nothing and not ruffle feathers,” to “how do we use this conflict for positive change and create a shared reality?”
- d. Continue to seek ways to be more inclusive of all gender expressions and identities, e.g., providing unisex bathrooms available for students and clearly labeling unisex bathrooms for adults.

### **4. Ongoing evaluation**

- a. Students need to participate and be included in the ongoing evaluation process of their experience, e.g., formal and informal surveys, class meetings, student assessments of teachers and classes, Middle School Gatherings, Advisory.
- b. Continue to maintain records in order to better measure movement toward the School’s stated goals, values, and mission, e.g., monitoring student attrition by race and ethnicity, trends in annual family surveys, exit interview statistics and/or trends.
- c. Continue to assess programs that promote a safe environment for every person to take risks and bring their authentic selves to the community.
- d. Discover how our community members choose to allocate their resources at RDS, e.g., how many parents volunteer, growth or decline in application numbers, rise or fall in amount of Annual Fund raised and increased participation percentages. These indicators should fluctuate based on how inviting and welcoming our school feels.

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**Critical Issue: Creation of a curriculum that is inclusive of diverse experiences and multiple perspectives.**

**1. Assessment**

- a. Continue to assess our curriculum development to ensure that it reflects a diverse range of experiences and includes a range of materials that validate all experiences and peoples.

**2. Increase Knowledge and Skills**

a. Administration

- i. Continue to provide and encourage professional and personal development that supports our administrators as leaders and equips them to be culturally competent resources.
- ii. Continue the process of developing both diverse and challenging curricula that prepares students to make decisions and act as leaders.
- iii. Continue to provide more professional development opportunities for faculty and staff that are focused on sustaining an equitable and just learning community.
- iv. Continue to develop the expectations and understanding of the value of frequent and required professional development.

b. Teachers

- i. Continue frequent professional development so that teachers can learn and create authentically diverse and developmentally appropriate curricula.
- ii. Continue to provide and require professional and personal goal-setting opportunities for teachers, making sure that diversity work is included.
- iii. Continue to provide forums for current teachers to provide in-house training as well as continuing opportunities to share best practices in regards to teaching in a diverse community, e.g., implementing RDS-based workshops taught by our own expert teachers, continuing Faculty Learning Groups, etc.
- iv. Continue to enrich and provide academic programs that are grounded in developmentally appropriate expectations and that challenge the full range of learners in our community.

c. Staff

- i. Continue to provide opportunities for staff to develop professional and personal goals that relate to diversity work (equity and justice?) in their field.
- ii. Offer more professional development with a focus on what a diverse workplace looks like and how best to work in it.
- iii. Utilize the expertise of current staff to provide in-house training and forums for staff to share best practices.
- iv. Provide more opportunities for staff to serve as models for inclusive behavior

d. Students

- i. Continue to ensure exposure to a broad range of developmentally appropriate experiences to strengthen students' cultural competencies.
- ii. Articulate why a broad range of developmentally appropriate experiences can enhance the students' understanding and way of being in the world to develop skills to become advocates for themselves and others, e.g., developing advisory curriculum, continuing service learning experiences, etc.

### **3. Implementation**

- a. Continue to implement yearly programming for all administrators, faculty, staff and students with the goal of increasing participation in a diverse community, e.g., bringing in speakers, providing workshops, attending conferences, etc.
- b. Continue to implement the use of diverse lenses to develop curricular and co-curricular programming, e.g., providing opportunities for a variety of staff, faculty and administrators to sit on programming committees, connecting with other independent school curriculum experts, etc.
- c. Continue to publicly and clearly articulate the School's mission and how it relates to supporting a diverse and inclusive curriculum.
- d. Continue to integrate service-learning opportunities to more authentically involve our larger Oakland community.

### **4. Ongoing Evaluation**

- a. Continue development of a frequent and regular audit of all curricular and co-curricular programming for its effectiveness in supporting diversity efforts at the School.
- b. Continue to annually revisit all employees' personal and professional goals as they pertain to areas of diversity.

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**Critical Issue: Strengthen our admissions process to create an inclusive and diverse school community.**

**1. Assessment**

- a. Continue to expand and explore the mechanisms by which outreach and marketing strategies are carried out as well as maintain accurate records in the databases.
- b. Expand communication of our outreach and marketing strategies to the RDS faculty and staff.
- c. Continue to maintain the admissions database and expand the criteria used in the database that records our students, parents, who RDS accepts (and doesn't), who accepts RDS (and doesn't), by race and ethnicity.
- d. Expand analysis of the data in longitudinal and annual reports to look at our enrollment trends so that the Admissions Department can strengthen recruitment and marketing strategies to best reach projected class composition.
  - i. Include NAIS Annual Demographic Report

**2. Increase skills and knowledge**

- a. Administration
  - i. Continue to review individual and collective roles in the admissions process for creating a diverse community at RDS.
  - ii. Define the role of each administrator in creating a welcoming and inviting community.
  - iii. Review and enhance open house programming/format to ensure mindful inclusion of diverse voices in the School.
- b. Teachers
  - i. Continue to review and expand teachers' roles in the admissions process, especially the role of teachers in entry point grades, from family inquiry to enrollment, e.g., reading student admissions files, providing input on applicants, being a part of the decision making process, etc.
- c. Staff
  - i. Provide a foundation of knowledge about the School, so that all staff is able to participate in welcoming of new and/or prospective families, a possible example could be to include administrative and staff offices on tour routes.
- d. Students
  - i. Increase student participation in the admissions process, e.g., setting up phone-a-thons, writing letters, attending fairs, etc.

**3. Implementation**

- a. Continue to strengthen the communication of admissions annual recruitment plan to faculty and staff.
- b. Clarify the application process and everyone's role within it so that it is fully inclusive of teachers involved.
- c. Continue education sessions to update all who are involved in school tours to best prepare our entire community to be ambassadors for RDS.

- d. Expand our Service Learning Program so that it plays a more prominent role in the daily life of our school, which directly impacts our ability to recruit prospective families.

**4. Ongoing evaluation**

- a. Present demographic breakdown by grade including information about: faculty children, LGBT families, percentage of financial aid by grade, cities in which families live, trustee students; and, by race and ethnicity: students, RDS employees, guardians/parents, etc., so that RDS employees are better prepared to respond to prospective families.
- b. Continue to administer standardized surveys for those who did not select RDS and study the information for trends. Make the findings available for use in the ongoing evaluation of the School.

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**Critical Issue: Continue to develop methods of communication and greater accessibility of information.**

**1. Assessment**

- a. Continue identification and subsequent communication of the formal and informal ways that things work, e.g., how decisions are made, employee participation in events and expectations at Redwood Day for faculty, staff and administration.
- b. Strengthen and standardize the dissemination of information as to better navigate the culture of RDS, e.g., handbooks, grievance policies, and online access.
- c. Continue to evaluate handbooks for relevancy, effectiveness and accuracy of data, e.g., tutoring guidelines, facility use, professional development funding and allocations, dress code, illness and communicable diseases, etc.

**2. Increase knowledge and skills**

a. Administration

- i. Continue to have open access for conversations (small groups) with families, faculty and staff.
- ii. Strengthen ongoing communication between lower and middle divisions.
- iii. Continue to grow skills, awareness and abilities to address needs of each diverse constituency, e.g., families without access to technology, families with first languages other than English, and families with multiple jobs.
- iv. Strengthen knowledge so that we can develop awareness for recognizing the symptoms and addressing the misunderstandings that can arise among faculty, staff and administration.
- v. Continue to seek proactive methods for positive and forward-moving interaction between administrators, staff and faculty, e.g., all faculty/staff meetings, Faculty Learning Groups, in-service days and professional development.
- vi. Develop language and behaviors that are inclusive and mindful of the demographic makeup of the RDS community, e.g., new student/family orientations, new family receptions, fundraising.

b. Teachers

- i. Ongoing, intentional interaction and monitoring of kids as they move through the grades, for example, pass up files for each child that move with the child from K-8.
- ii. Incorporating questions to mitigate perpetuating bias and strengthen our incorporation of questions that illuminate a child's specific situation.
- iii. Strengthen ongoing communication between lower and middle divisions
- iv. Develop language and behaviors that are inclusive and mindful of the demographic makeup of the RDS community, e.g., new student/family orientations, new family receptions, and advisory groups.

c. Staff

- i. Strengthen ongoing communication between staff members to allow for authentic listening and appreciation of each other's views.

- ii. Continue to acquire and utilize language and behaviors that are inclusive and mindful of the demographic makeup of the RDS community.
- d. Students
  - i. Continue to develop inclusive behaviors that communicate an inclusive environment, e.g., student guide training, advisory, guest speakers, and classroom projects.
  - ii. Continue to acquire and utilize language and behaviors that are inclusive and mindful of the demographic makeup of the RDS community.

### **3. Implementation**

- a. Strengthen availability of accessible information for staff, faculty and students, e.g., online faculty resources, Friday Folder, online homework availability. Continue to ensure information is provided in a timely and efficient manner.
- b. Continue to frequently update handbooks as reference for staff, faculty and students.
- c. Develop and actively participate in formal mentor programs for new teachers that focus on conveying formal and informal rules and expectations for all RDS community members.
- d. Develop positive and forward-moving methods to strengthen knowledge and awareness so that we can develop systems for recognizing the symptoms that can cause misunderstandings among faculty, staff and administration
- e. Continue to strengthen and standardize appropriate boundaries and communication with families, faculty, staff and administration.
- f. Design protocols and practices for institutionalizing inclusive methods of communication, e.g., asking families for the best line of communication for them.

### **4. Ongoing evaluation**

- a. Continue to analyze the methods of distribution of the annual survey and the data gathered from the surveys to parents/guardians for the purpose of strengthening our various modes of communication.
- b. Continue to strengthen our support services for students so that we can best serve them.

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**Critical issue: Retention of diverse families and staff.**

**1. Assessment**

- a. Continue to review exit interviews for parents and staff to ensure that the process used provides opportunities for people to speak fully about why they are leaving the School.
- b. Continue to assess whether the current exit interview practices are providing information that will enable RDS to create a hospitable environment for all of its community members.
- c. Continue to create and maintain employee records for race, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, prior educational experience (when asking for data, explicitly laying out the use or the information provided to assist us with our diversity work, not making assumption that everyone knows)
- d. Continue longitudinal, statistical analysis of fundraising efforts to be sure that all members of the community have an equitable opportunity to participate.

**2. Increase Knowledge and Skills**

a. Administration

- i. Develop greater understanding of what forces impact retention.
- ii. Develop an understanding of what the changing demographics of the USA will be in 2040, as no group will be a majority.
- iii. Create the ability to see patterns of issues of retention as well as seeing each case as a specific incident.
- iv. Educate the community to the value of service learning involving our larger Oakland community and how it will enrich the learning environment.
- v. Educate the community that forming partnerships with other groups for sources of funding for financial aid and RDS programs, not tied to the operating budget & RDSPA, will enrich the learning environment.
- vi. Continue to enhance the understanding that better decisions are made by a diverse group of decision-makers. It is essential to work toward having all people's perspectives, visions, and voices at the table.
- vii. Develop greater understanding throughout the community that having a critical mass of teachers, staff, and students of color, K-8, provides enough shared experience in each constituency so that people feel safe disagreeing with one another. A critical mass lessens the need for individuals to feel that they must represent their entire race/ethnicity, and so on.
- viii. Connect the need to hire and retain more teachers and staff of color to the mission of the School.

b. Teachers

- i. Continue to identify the behaviors and processes that connect the lower and middle schools. Encourage greater intentional collaboration that would enhance retention.
- ii. Strengthen the understanding of the work that each division does; through greater knowledge comes greater respect, e.g., Faculty Learning Groups, Buddies, curricular overview, professional development, Welcome to My World, etc.

- iii. Continue to develop the skills to intentionally create classroom environments and curricula in which a broad diversity of people and experiences are represented. Every child should be able to see herself/himself reflected in the classroom experience.
- iv. Continue to develop a school environment in which transgender children are welcomed and safe from negative judgments of others.
- v. Strengthen participation in professional development opportunities that are focused around areas of privilege, with the understanding that greater knowledge can lead to a stronger community.
- c. Staff
  - i. Continue to enhance the understanding throughout the community that having a critical mass of *staff* of color, K-8, provides enough shared experience in each constituency so that people feel safe disagreeing with one another. A critical mass lessens the need to feel that individuals must represent their entire race/ethnicity, and so on.
  - ii. Continue to develop skills in working effectively with diverse groups of families, students, and teachers.
  - iii. Strengthen participation in professional development opportunities that are focused around areas of privilege, with the understanding that greater knowledge can lead to a stronger community.
- d. Students
  - i. Develop greater understanding throughout the community that having a critical mass of *students of color*, K-8, provides enough shared experience in each constituency so that people feel safe disagreeing with one another and bringing all of themselves to school. A critical mass lessens the need to feel that individuals must represent their entire race/ethnicity, and so on.

### **3. Implementation**

- a. Use information gathered in exit interviews to enhance climate and culture to be more hospitable and inclusive.
- b. Develop and implement programs and practices that underscore the central tenet that every family/person is of equal value.
- c. Develop a range of service-learning opportunities that continues through the K-8 curriculum.
- d. Create a collection of readings and research on building school cultures and climates that are consistently supportive and welcoming to everyone in the School community. Some possible vehicles for collecting these materials and/or implementing research are Parent University, Prism, etc.
- e. Continue to seek partnerships with other groups for sources of funding for financial aid and RDS programs, not tied to the operating budget or RDSPA, to enrich the learning environment.
- f. Continue to provide professional development that will explore whiteness and privilege and how it connects to the ability to create an inclusive and welcoming school.
- g. Continue to examine where we advertise and what media forms used.

### **4. Ongoing Evaluation**

- a. Continue ongoing evaluation of curriculum to see that it is meeting specific goals inherent to developing an inclusive culture and climate.
- b. Continually reassess what evaluation looks like, so that it becomes more ongoing, informal and natural to the process of learning (you can teach what you have learned).

- c. Continue to examine whether it is worthwhile to connect to local colleges and universities in the training of faculty of color.
- d. Examine whether there is a place in the intern program to attract and retain faculty of color.