

# Widening the Lens

The Far Brook School Diversity Conference

## TRUSTEE CONSTITUENT GROUP CONVERSATION STARTERS

### QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

"Since the wider sense of community for all students and adults is compromised when racism is left unexamined, conversations on race and racism should be held across and among the various constituencies in the school community. Talking about race and racism is not something only black people and other people of color should do. While interracial dialogue that directly addresses race, racism, and privilege may be difficult to engage in, it is necessary that these conversations take place."

- Edith G. Arrington, Diane M. Hall, and Howard C. Stevenson  
*"The Success of African American Students in Independent Schools"*

"As the decision-making body at the highest level of organizational leadership, boards play a critical role in creating an organization that prioritizes, supports, and invests in diversity, inclusion, and equity.

Whether in the hiring of the executive, the determination of strategy, the allocation of resources, or the goal of serving the community with authenticity, the board's leadership on diversity, inclusion, and equity matters.

As stewards of the public good, all social sector organizations, regardless of mission, are called on to embrace and celebrate our common humanity, and the inherent worth of all people. In doing so, we must also acknowledge that a climate of growing intolerance and inequity is a challenge to our democratic values and ideals. Divisions along economic, racial, religious, and political lines have created an increasingly polarized society in need of healing. And the complex issues and dynamics at the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality call for deeper thinking as we seek to understand each other.

We believe that social sector organizations are better able to do this work effectively and with authenticity when they are led by boards that are :

- **diverse:** The individual leaders who compose nonprofit boards are a reflection of an organization's values and beliefs about who should be empowered and entrusted with its most important decisions. We believe that all social sector organizations can better achieve their missions by drawing on the skills, talents, and perspectives of a broader and more diverse range of leaders, and that the diversity of viewpoints that comes from

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different life experiences and cultural backgrounds strengthens board deliberations and decision-making.

- **inclusive:** The most effective boards work to build a culture of trust, candor, and respect — none of which is possible without a culture of inclusion. Boards that cultivate an inclusive culture ensure that all board members are encouraged to bring their perspectives, identity, and life experience to their board service. An inclusive board culture welcomes and celebrates differences and ensures that all board members are equally engaged and invested, sharing power and responsibility for the organization’s mission and the board’s work.
- **equity-focused:** Boards play a critical role in helping organizations understand the context in which they work and how best to prioritize resources and strategies based on that reality. An awareness of how systemic inequities have affected our society and those an organization serves enables boards to avoid blind spots that can lead to flawed strategies, and creates powerful opportunities to deepen the organization’s impact, relevance, and advancement of the public good."

*-Board Source.org*

“Independent schools sing the praises of diversity and inclusion, but not all of them actually do the work of making their schools diverse and inclusive. For many schools, the first step toward action is recognizing how a history of exclusion has contributed to the school’s culture—and then doing the work of changing that culture....

...As a result, “diversity” frequently appears in school promotional materials, in strategic plans, and as a bullet on a list of challenges facing independent schools. Some stated goals are filled with language that emphasizes the value of difference, the whole person, and creating global citizens.

In fact, some schools have made progress in recruiting students from a range of social, racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. These efforts are commendable. But many schools are still far from mirroring the exchanges around diversity and inclusion that are happening in society.

Publicly, independent schools appear to be creating a more inclusive learning environment. But privately, the history of racial status quo is thriving as some schools are reluctant to do the work to become more inclusive. There continues to be concern about the experiences of students of color related to their social and emotional support, academic placement, and sense of belonging. The overwhelming perception is that independent schools are not ready to integrate diversity and inclusion into their educational and social structure.”

*-Philip McAdoo, Independent School Magazine  
“What Does It Take to Be Truly Inclusive.”*

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### **#Blackat INSTAGRAM POSTS**

"While I want to believe that institutions like [the school] will do right by their black students, the harsh reality is that they don't have to. [The school] was never founded for brown girls and the dynamic of the institution is set up to remind us every day that we do not belong. Students created an entire external organization...of which many [of the school's] girls were members - to provide support to students of color in private/independent schools. If [the school] didn't get the hint that they needed to re-evaluate their inclusion efforts, it's not because they couldn't see it, but simply because they chose not to."

*#InstitutionalFocusOnStudentsofColor*

"We had to beg teachers and students to stop saying the N-Word. Only after we made a petition, wrote an open letter, and had several meetings with faculty did we see minor changes. Do you think we enjoy having to constantly advocate for ourselves? Why are black students treated like [the school's] free diversity consultants?"

*#N-Word*

*#BlackStudentsasDiversityConsultants*

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## QUESTIONS

**Question 1:** In what way are independent school boards “stewards of the public good” as described by Board Source.org.

**Questions 2:** Is your Board reflective of the school community?

**Question 3:** Is diversity and inclusion a stated priority of your board? In what way? (i.e., Board Diversity Committee, Diversity Statement, Anti-Racism Statement, other)

**Question 4:** How are DEI goals incorporated in your Head of School evaluation process?

**Question 5:** Is DEI skill and experience a preferred qualification when you are hiring a Head of School? How is this communicated?

**Question 6:** Are measurable DEI objectives included in your strategic plan?

**Question 7:** In what tangible ways is the school community made aware of the Board’s commitment to diversity and inclusion? (i.e., Line item in budget, Board presence/participation in DEI events/initiatives, Board communications, etc.)