



West Side Montessori School

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging Programming & Activities

EVALUATION REPORT

MAY 2022

Executive Summary	2
Evaluation Methodology	3
Observations	5
Observation 1	5
Observation 2	19
Observation 3	29
Conclusion	34
About Luminary Evaluation Group	35



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Executive Summary

For nearly 60 years, West Side Montessori School (WSMS) has provided innovative, dynamic early childhood education that combines key aspects of Montessori curriculum with the best practices of current child development. A cornerstone of WSMS's approach is that they reflect their economically, racially, culturally, and intellectually diverse community. The school's current strategic goals include a strong emphasis on equity-informed and antiracist practices with an aim to be at the forefront of the early learning field and to provide the best experiences for the children every day.

WSMS engaged Luminary Evaluation Group to conduct an independent evaluation of WSMS's diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) programs and activities to assess their execution, engagement, and effectiveness. The purpose of the evaluation is to illuminate examples of how these programs affect the WSMS community and what additional opportunities may be available for further impact.

Based on data collected, the WSMS community, including current and alumni families; WSMS faculty and staff; and current and former members of the Board of Directors report that the school has made effective and intentional investments in DEIB resulting in experiences of inclusion and a sense of belonging.

FIGURE 1 presents the observations from the evaluation process.

FIGURE 1 Summary of Observations

Observation 1

WSMS authentically embeds DEIB into the in-school experience, which meaningfully impacts the perceptual development of early learners.

Observation 2

WSMS's commitment to DEIB differentiates it as an institution and a leader in the educational landscape.

Observation 3

Deepening the home-school connection is an area of opportunity for the continued evolution of DEIB activities.



Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation spanned seven months, from November 2021 to May 2022, and focused on answering the following key questions.

Key Questions

What are the key elements of WSMS's DEIB activities?

How do these key elements align with best practices in early education? Considering best practices amongst the peer landscape, what opportunities exist for WSMS to be a leader or a learner?

Programmatic Impact: In-School Experience

In what ways do DEIB activities change how children learn and grow at school?

How has the emphasis on DEIB with WSMS educators impacted their perceptions, behaviors, and teaching practices?

What effect has the application of DEIB principles had on teaching and learning?

Programmatic Impact: Family Engagement

What is the perception of WSMS's commitment to DEIB among parents and families? How do they view their own involvement? How has this perception evolved since their first interaction with WSMS?

How does DEIB programming build or enhance relationships with families and children, if at all?

What are the opportunities to collaborate with families related to DEIB?

How have DEIB activities affected the interaction and engagement between parents and the school?

The evaluation was implemented in two phases:

- 1 Discovery & Data Collection
- 2 Analysis & Reporting

The evaluation design was informed by a DEIB Evaluation Review Team. The team consisted of WSMS administrative leaders; members of the WSMS Board of Directors, including leaders of the Board's WSMS DEIB Committee; and consultants from Luminary Evaluation Group. Throughout the phases of the evaluation, meetings were held to inform on interview and focus group questions, survey questions, and preliminary data review. The purpose of the evaluation review team was to have input on design and to gain valuable feedback based on the participant's experience, comfort, and perception.

The evaluation utilized four types of data:

Artifacts

Luminary reviewed documents, reports, tools, photos, meeting minutes, workshop slide decks, resource materials, demographic information, listserv email exchanges, and curriculum samples generated by the WSMS team.

Qualitative Interviews

Luminary conducted 17 interviews to capture the stories and experiences of WSMS members of the Board of Directors (current and former), current parents; alumni parents; and faculty and staff. To optimize a representative sample of faculty and staff, the Evaluation Review Team intentionally selected faculty members who had been employed at WSMS for less than one year; faculty members who had been employed at WSMS for three years or more; staff who have been employed at WSMS for less than one year; and staff who had been employed at WSMS for three years or more. Luminary and the Evaluation Review Team co-constructed the interview questions and approach.

Focus Groups

Luminary worked with WSMS and the Evaluation Review Team to design a set of four focus groups. The audiences for the focus groups were current parents and caregivers of WSMS students; WSMS faculty members WSMS

administrative (non-teaching) staff; and members of the WSMS Board of Directors. The aim of the focus groups was to develop a collective understanding of lessons learned, effectiveness, and shared impact.

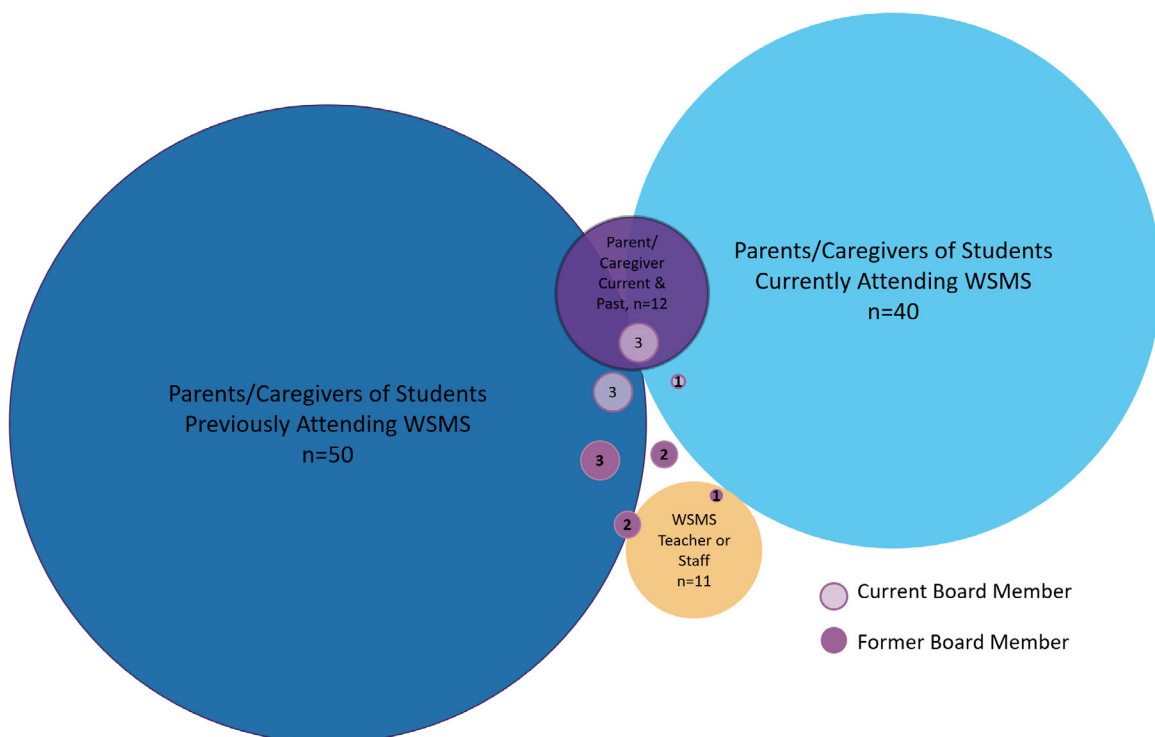
Survey Data

Luminary worked with WSMS and the Evaluation Review Team to design surveys for stakeholders, including parents/families of students (current and alumni); staff; faculty and members of the Board of Directors (current and former).

The surveys investigated the elements of DEIB programming and learning to which stakeholders are exposed. They also measured perceptions, attitudes, and practices that stakeholders experienced as a result of their interactions and participation. The survey was completed by **128** respondents between March 28 and May 2, 2022. **FIGURE 2** shows the different roles with which the survey respondents identified and their overlapping identities within WSMS.

Among 128 respondents, 74 identified as parents or caregivers of students previously attending WSMS whereas 56 identified as parents or caregivers of students currently attending WSMS. Fifteen respondents identified as current or former members of the Board of Directors (seven current and eight former) and eleven respondents identified as WSMS staff or faculty (six faculty members and eight administrative/non-teaching staff).

FIGURE 2 Survey Respondents' Relationships to WSMS





Observations

Observation 1: WSMS authentically embeds DEIB into the in-school experience, which meaningfully impacts the perceptual development of early learners.

The Montessori approach to cultivating individuality and encouraging children to develop agency paves the way for WSMS to effectively offer activities and programming with a focus on DEIB. An interviewed parent described that WSMS's implementation of Montessori education "recognizes the individuality of each child and celebrates that." Current and alumni parents appreciate how WSMS has leveraged the Montessori approach to deliver DEIB lessons to students.

Throughout evaluation process, it was reported that WSMS delivers DEIB curriculum to early learners by offering lessons rooted in kindness and belonging while inviting families to share their personal stories. Some stakeholders recognize that this values-meets-individuality approach creates an environment in which "children can see themselves and teachers are mindful about materials and the environment." It also creates a culture in which children feel celebrated for who they are, and families feel excited to partner in their child's learning.

Families identified that WSMS's approach balances helping children choose their learning and develop at their own pace, while also personalizing how DEIB concepts are delivered based on a child's developmental level. One interviewed parent shared, "WSMS is child-led with a navigation system in place," while at the same time, a survey respondent noted that WSMS faculty "meet the child where they are" as they engage in this work.

Daily classroom activities evidence embedded DEIB.

Classroom activities and the school environment evidence that DEIB is embedded within the WSMS curriculum – and that it has been integrated over time. Classrooms are filled with books embracing DEIB in different ways: some help children learn about different cultures, whereas others feature narratives focused on people or communities of color written by authors of color. There are many books about belonging, peace, and how people can be different yet get along.

WSMS embeds DEIB into the everyday learning experience by depicting people of different ethnicities and cultures throughout the school, from the art displayed in the classroom to caricatures of people on directional signs to the types of dolls with which the children play.

The curriculum activities that were most frequently discussed during data collection were those that involved labeling race and celebrating different skin colors. Many classrooms engaged in this activity over many years, with each faculty member individualizing how they executed the exercise. In its most basic form, the activity involves having children blend their own paint color that creates the color of their skin.

Me Museum

Another popular activity that runs year-round is the Me Museum. The Me Museum gives children an opportunity to bring in a photo from each year of their life and "show and tell" the class about themselves. Each child has a week to star in the Me Museum and they are allocated a display case in which they display their photos and memorabilia. They also can bring in one of their favorite picture books, which gets read to the class. The intent of the Me Museum is to allow classrooms to celebrate individuals, help students develop a sense of personal identity, and cultivate safe, respectful classroom communities.

Some stakeholders shared that many families embrace the Me Museum as an opportunity to share their culture or their child's birth story. If the child and family choose, the Me Museum could be a way for the child to share their values, customs, and traditions with the classroom. It is a vehicle to expose children to others' differences.

A parent shared that the Me Museum "allowed us to tell [my child's] birth story and make her adoption story a part of the larger story of her life. It was just one piece of many things that make her who she is. The open-mindedness of that, the centering of the child, allowed for it." That parent went on to share that the Me Museum activity was not necessarily designed for that purpose: "Another family might not have taken advantage of that; the family can choose what to bring forth [based on] what was important to them." Importantly, this parent voiced that the Me Museum was "an invitation, not a requirement" to discuss a family's culture or the family makeup.

"It was an invitation, not a requirement."

Changemakers Study

Beyond learning about their own differences, early learners are encouraged to learn about historical figures who have historically and/or systemically marginalized identities, such as women, people of color, and women of color. During the data collection process, some stakeholders often mentioned the changemakers study. In this component of the curriculum, faculty members introduced historical figures to students through small posters and picture books. The posters provided concise content on a changemaker's achievements accompanied by their photos. Peacemakers were spotlighted as part of the changemaker study as well.

Many faculty members delivered lessons to the class on specific historical figures. Parents recounted these lessons fondly and appreciated the age-appropriate nature with which these lessons were delivered. One parent reflected that the values "start to lay the groundwork" for children to understand the importance of revering important historical figures, particularly those of color and those with other marginalized identities, and appreciating the values that those figures propagated.

Library Books

WSMS faculty and staff engaged in an intentional review process of all books in the WSMS library to ensure their alignment with DEIB values. WSMS faculty committed to removing any books with stories or illustrations that stereotyped or marginalized identities. This thorough review assured and set an ongoing standard that books perpetuating discrimination and bias would not be tolerated in the WSMS community.

Classroom Environments








Further, WSMS equitably embeds diversity and belonging into classroom environments. For example, classrooms include baby dolls of Black and Asian ethnicities. Faceless peg blocks in the shape of people represent the spectrum of color of human skin. Classroom picture books spotlight DEIB through explicit messages discussing peace and celebrating diversity as well as through more implicit messaging, such as stories with narratives featuring people of historically marginalized cultures or ethnicities or books written by authors of color.

Students experience DEIB not only through implicit curriculum, explicit lessons, and their interactions with faculty and staff, but also in the cafeteria. WSMS's lunch menu incorporates a variety of international dishes into its offerings. Viewing a sample of the lunch menu from May 2016, offerings largely fell in line with mainstream American cuisine. Comparatively, in April 2022, WSMS has intentionally incorporated authentic dishes from a variety of cultures into their offerings. In a given month, students eat Asian, Caribbean, Greek, Mexican, Indian/East Asian cuisine in the WSMS cafeteria.

TABLE 1 details examples of DEIB curriculum integrated into the in-school experience at WSMS.



TABLE 1 Examples of DEIB curriculum at WSMS

<p>Dolls</p>  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black and Asian baby dolls • Girl dolls of different indigenous nationalities including cultures of Africa, Asia, and Latin America • Peg dolls of different skin colors 	<p>Signs</p>	<p>Handwashing signs in bathroom depict hands of a person of color</p>
<p>Art</p>	<p>Art depicts people and children of color and children from different cultural communities</p>	<p>Advocacy</p> 	<p>A “BLM: Equal Rights, Equal Justice” sign is hung on the exterior window of WSMS</p>
<p>Classroom Peace Contract</p> 	<p>Classrooms make their own Peace Contract that sets expectations for respectful behavior in the classroom. Students express their agreement by stamping their handprint on the poster.</p>	<p>Lunch Menu</p>	<p>The lunch menu incorporates international dishes into its offerings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caribbean chicken thighs with brown rice and peas • Lentil daal, coconut rice, wheat naan, and tomato and cucumber salad • Lemon soy baked salmon with whole wheat Asian noodles and bok choy • Pinto bean and cheese quesadillas with Mexican corn salad • Pork souvlaki with roasted lemon-oregano potatoes and Greek salad
<p>Books</p>  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library of picture books in a classroom depict stories from a variety of cultures, including Black American; indigenous African; Asian; and Latin American • Library of books intentionally excludes narratives that stereotype or marginalize identities • A children’s book about antiracism • A children’s book about ethnicities across the globe • A picture book about peace depicting children of different ethnicities • A picture book by prominent feminist author and social activist bell hooks • Picture books written by authors of color of and of different heritages • Picture books about holidays celebrated by people of different cultures • Many picture books of different topics show children of different ethnicities and abilities together and bonding. 		

Changemakers/ Peacemakers Study



Children learned about historical figures who have historically marginalized identities, including men of color (e.g., Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi) women of color (e.g., Katherine Johnson, Malala Yousefi); and women (e.g., Amelia Earhart, Jane Goodall).

Equity vs. Equality Lesson



Faculty members demonstrated the difference between equity and equality by distributing blocks to help block figures of different heights see over a wall. When some block figures still could not see over the wall, faculty members taught equity by placing more blocks under the shorter figures so that all figures could see over the wall. Children were encouraged to create equity among block people by experimenting on their own.

Skin & Hair Color Art Project



- Children were empowered to create their own skin and hair color using a palette of colors and materials.
- Children made their own paint color to use a handprint to stamp their agreement the classroom's peace contract, pledging to be kind, welcoming, and open.

Me Museum

Children can bring in a photo from each year of their life to "show and tell" the class about themselves. Each child has a week to star in the Me Museum and they are allocated a display case for their photos and memorabilia, including one of their favorite picture books which gets read to the class.

Art projects and parent lessons related to celebrating holidays around the world



- Chinese Lunar New Year presentation by parents in which children learned the significance of red envelopes, elaborate knots, lanterns, and flowering branches. For art projects, children made paper lanterns and created lucky word signs on traditional paper and ink.
- Korean Lunar New Year presentation by parents in which children learned about the dress, food, and customs of Korean New Year. A child demonstrated a Korean game she likes to play with her family and wore a traditional *han bok* saved for New Year celebrations. The family shared a traditional pouch with each child in the class. For related art projects, children depicted fireworks on black construction paper using paint, since fireworks are traditionally meant to scare away the legendary monster Nian.
- Diwali presentation by parents in which children learned about the holiday and its traditional fireworks, apparel, and food. As a related art project, children painted *diyas* and rainbow tea lights.
- Study of quilts created by Gee's Bend Collective, a group comprised of generations of African American women who created textile masterpieces in Gee's Bend, Alabama.
- A Korean parent Zoomed in to read a traditional Korean folk tale that had Korean words.
- Learning about Alma Thomas, the first Black woman to have her art in the White House, the children colored squares and painted with sponges to imitate the artist's work.
- Parents presented about Réunion Island on a special day by reading a book and playing traditional music.

Families recognize the effect of DEIB in the classroom.

Beyond awareness of and appreciation for WSMS's DEIB programming and activities, families demonstrated an understanding that WSMS embeds DEIB into the fabric of the classroom experience for children. From curriculum activities to more implicit learnings, such as the toys and books available in the classroom and the way in which faculty and staff approach conversations with students, families recognize WSMS' commitment to DEIB.

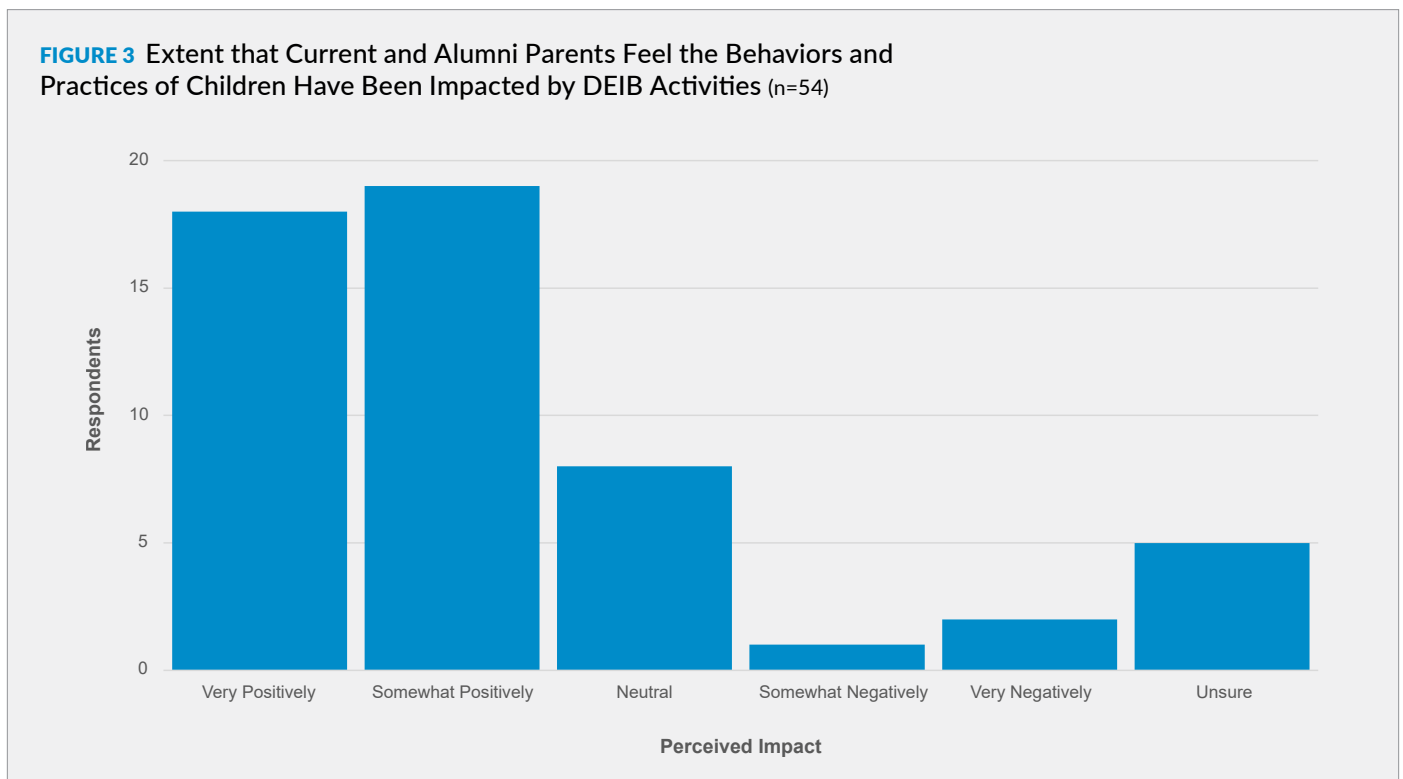
As shown in **FIGURE 3**, many current and alumni parents notice a positive impact of DEIB activities on their children. More than two-thirds of surveyed parents felt that the behaviors and practices of their children had been positively impacted by DEIB activities. Nine percent of parents shared that they were unsure whether their children were either positively or negatively impacted by DEIB activities, whereas 15% of parents believed that the impact upon their children had been neutral. One respondent (2%) felt that the behaviors and practices of children had been impacted somewhat negatively by DEIB activities, whereas two respondents (4%) felt that the behaviors and practices of children had been impacted very negatively by DEIB activities.

Parents also expressed that they have observed their children bringing home the values they are taught in the classroom. Some parents interpreted their children's learnings as occurring on a perceptual, cognitive level more than on a behavioral level. One parent shared that "at this age, you start

the approach of introducing these topics," but noted they were unsure if their child comprehended the lessons on a conscious, processing level.

Many current and alumni parents reported that their children have become more vocal about how they want to celebrate differences and encourage their families to do the same. Some parents recounted that their children are more likely to describe the colors of their skin in shades of brown and peach, which reflects a classroom lesson during which they used paint colors to blend their own skin tones. Parents expressed that they believed that being part of a diverse community helped their child learn more and was providing opportunities for children to be considerate of one another.

One parent reflected positively on her child's experience with WSMS's DEIB programming and activities. The parent said that for her child, it was "imperative" that faculty and staff used language to normalize that all families are differently composed and that all skin colors are unique and equal. The parent expressed that her family was exposing the child to this language and behavior at home, but that the equity reinforcement at school was essential to her child's development. As a result, "[my child] can feel proud of who [they are]," the parent shared. "[My child] doesn't hold on to any anxiety around that, can put that aside and engage in math, literacy, [and] building social relationships without any hesitation or baggage." This parent viewed the embeddedness of DEIB within the WSMS in-school experience as a vehicle for developing a positive self-image.



One parent recalled how her daughter bonded with a faculty member who shared a similar culture. The child and faculty member discussed shared holidays and would swap words from their similar (though different) traditional languages. The parent reflected that her child had a positive experience discussing her cultural traditions and language of origin with a faculty member at school.

Current and alumni families also noticed that WSMS encourages and provides opportunities for children who speak different languages to interact. One parent recounted a child in her child's classroom whose first language was Spanish. When the parent came into the classroom, she saw a faculty member sitting between the Spanish-speaking child and her child, who only spoke English. The faculty member also spoke Spanish and translated between the two children as they played together. The parent recounts, "This was a beautiful experience. Now [my child] understands that not everyone's first language is English." In reflecting on the faculty member sitting between the two children and translating, the parent shared, "DEIB is truly engrained in the teacher's practices and children's learning."

Some stakeholders reported other examples of the way that DEIB work enhanced children's in-school experiences. The awareness and celebration of cultures introduces and normalizes difference to early learners. It encourages a nondiscriminatory curiosity and pure interest in learning more about what matters to other people as individuals. One staff member who visits different classrooms shared that over time, she has observed more classrooms engaging in lessons that immerse students in different cultures.

Some stakeholders shared that faculty members are having conversations with children about identities that make us different. Children are taught to not only normalize but also celebrate differences. Through classroom activities, children are taught to label race in a way void of bias. In discussing her child's experience sharing with the class that she was adopted, a parent voiced that the child was free to speak about her birth mother: "The teachers used language to make it clear to everyone in the classroom that this is another way that families are created." This demonstrates an intentional removal of bias and celebration of differences in how faculty frame situations which have historically been plagued by discrimination.

Another example of an embedded activity that some faculty, staff members, current parents, and alumni parents often referenced was that after children created their own paint color that matched their skin, they were given the opportunity to name the color they created. The faculty put together a bulletin board of children's handprints accompanied by the name of the color each child had named their paint shade. Children were not limited in what they could name their paint color, and so this parent reports that children named their colors *star sh* and *banana*. The parent, laughing, shared: "It was a sweet way to celebrate and acknowledge difference without yet politicizing differences."

Another parent recounted a similar activity in which students were asked to create self-portraits using their own self-mixed paint color for the skin and their self-developed hair using art supplies. This activity gave children the agency to create their own hair using different mediums, which allowed children to experiment with not only color but also texture. Interviewed parents recalled that the faculty introduced the concept of equality in delivering this lesson.

Current families are kept abreast of DEIB activities in the classroom through class newsletters which are distributed every other week. The newsletters discuss the class's recent learning activities, including activities, lessons, and books that the children read. Newsletters also include questions for families to use to spark conversation with their WSMS student to bridge learning from the classroom to the home.

WSMS's commitment and investment in professional development supports faculty growth.

Throughout the evaluation, evidence was collected that demonstrated the WSMS commitment to investing in professional development to support the growth of their faculty and staff. In 2018, WSMS established a Diversity Council composed of one team member from each classroom. Each member of the Diversity Council is responsible for attending monthly Council meetings; participating in monthly meetings about Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity ("SEED"); giving and receiving feedback from classroom observations; connecting with each family regarding classroom visits and cultural traditions; sharing resources and plans for classroom implementation of antibias practices; and maintaining and updating the classroom library.

Conversations that occurred during Diversity Council convenings prompted the team to cultivate a list of DEIB-related professional development opportunities offered by external entities. At the start of the 2018-2019 school year, WSMS circulated a list of DEIB professional development opportunities to staff. These offerings included conferences across the country on topics including race amity, white privilege, multicultural leadership, and culturally responsive teaching.

In keeping with the ongoing commitment to progress, WSMS offered continued DEIB-related professional development to staff and faculty. Diversity, equity, and inclusion specialist Martha Haakmat provided a DEIB workshop to WSMS faculty and staff on June 10, 2020. On June 22, 2020, WSMS began offering recurring Monday evening virtual spaces for faculty and staff to discuss antiracism and DEIB initiatives. During the 2021-2022 school year, Ms. Haakmat offered space on Fridays for the WSMS faculty to ask questions and discuss DEIB in a safe, facilitated environment among colleagues.

In preparation for the 2020–2021 school year, WSMS began requiring that all employees engage in Anti-Bias Education and Implicit Bias trainings totaling three hours. WSMS Director Mimi Basso wrote in an email to faculty and staff: “Understanding our roles in creating an equitable, anti-racist school community is a worthy and necessary goal. The outcomes will be reflected in the children we serve and the collegial community as WSMS.”

Since June 2020, WSMS faculty and staff have received about two dozen emails from WSMS administrative leadership sharing resources or continuing conversations about DEIB. As detailed in **TABLE 3**, Ms. Haakmat continued to provide DEIB professional development to WSMS faculty in September 2020; October 2020; November 2020; January 2021; and September 2021. Additionally, Ms. Haakmat provided professional development to WSMS administrators in January 2021, September 2021, October 2021, and November 2021.

The professional development offered by Ms. Haakmat received high praise. Faculty and staff shared that they felt the environment during her session was free of judgment. They expressed appreciation that through the sessions, they received a great deal of feedback and were also offered further questions upon which they could continue to reflect on their own time. They capitalized on the time between sessions to digest and think through the information further.

During interviews, one faculty member shared that she “has been learning so much since she has started” attending sessions with Ms. Haakmat, whereas a staff member shared that she has been encouraged to “think about things [I] haven’t thought about before.” Another staff member shared that “it opened my eyes in ways that I didn’t know.”

Some staff and faculty reflected on the emotional component of DEIB learning. “DEIB professional development felt more emotional than learning a skill or concept,” one staff member shared. A faculty member noted, “It’s been very challenging work in a positive way.” Despite the emotional investment required to meaningfully grapple with DEIB work, faculty and staff report feeling invested in the process and supported by their administrators and colleagues.

TABLE 3 DEIB Professional Development Offered to WSMS Faculty & Staff by DEI Consultant Martha Haakmat

AUDIENCE	DATE	TOPIC OR GOAL
Faculty	9/1/2020	DEI Through Antiracism <i>Distributed Material:</i> Antiracism Checklist for Teachers; Personal Antiracism Continuum; DEIB Vocabulary Guide
Faculty	9/3/2020	Deconstructing Understanding of Racism & Broadening Knowledge of Racism in the US <i>Distributed Material:</i> Race reflection exercise from White Fragility (DiAngelo); Review of “Slavery to Mass Incarceration” video (Equal Justice Initiative)
Faculty	10/26/2020	Continue Building Individual & Team Awareness of Antiracism: Exploring racial diversity & antiracism in our curriculum <i>Distributed Material:</i> Antiracism Checklist for Teachers (review); “Four Core Goals of Anti-Bias Education” (NAEYC)
Faculty	11/9/2020	Continue Building Individual & Team Awareness of Antiracism: Practice race talk through real-life scenarios <i>Distributed Material:</i> Teacher Tips and Strategies for Race Talk; Scenarios Exercise
Faculty	1/6/2021	Raising Race in Reading
Administrators	1/10/2021	Administrative Leadership and Institutional Support for DEIB and Antiracism
Faculty	9/8/2021	Synthesizing Work & Applying Learnings to Goal Setting <i>Distributed Material:</i> WSMS Mission Statement & DEIB Exercise
Administrators	9/20/2021	Administrative Leadership and Institutional Support for DEIB and Antiracism
Administrators	10/18/2021	Social Identifier Exercise
Administrators	11/16/2021	Administrative Leadership and Institutional Support for DEIB and Antiracism Follow-Up

In reflecting on all types of tools that WSMS offered, faculty and staff largely believed that discussions with Ms. Haakmat and their own self-reflection were helpful to becoming more intentional and comfortable with DEIB. More than **three-quarters** of surveyed WSMS faculty and staff agreed that seminars with Ms. Haakmat, their own self-reflections, and team meetings helped them to become more intentional and comfortable with DEIB (FIGURE 5).

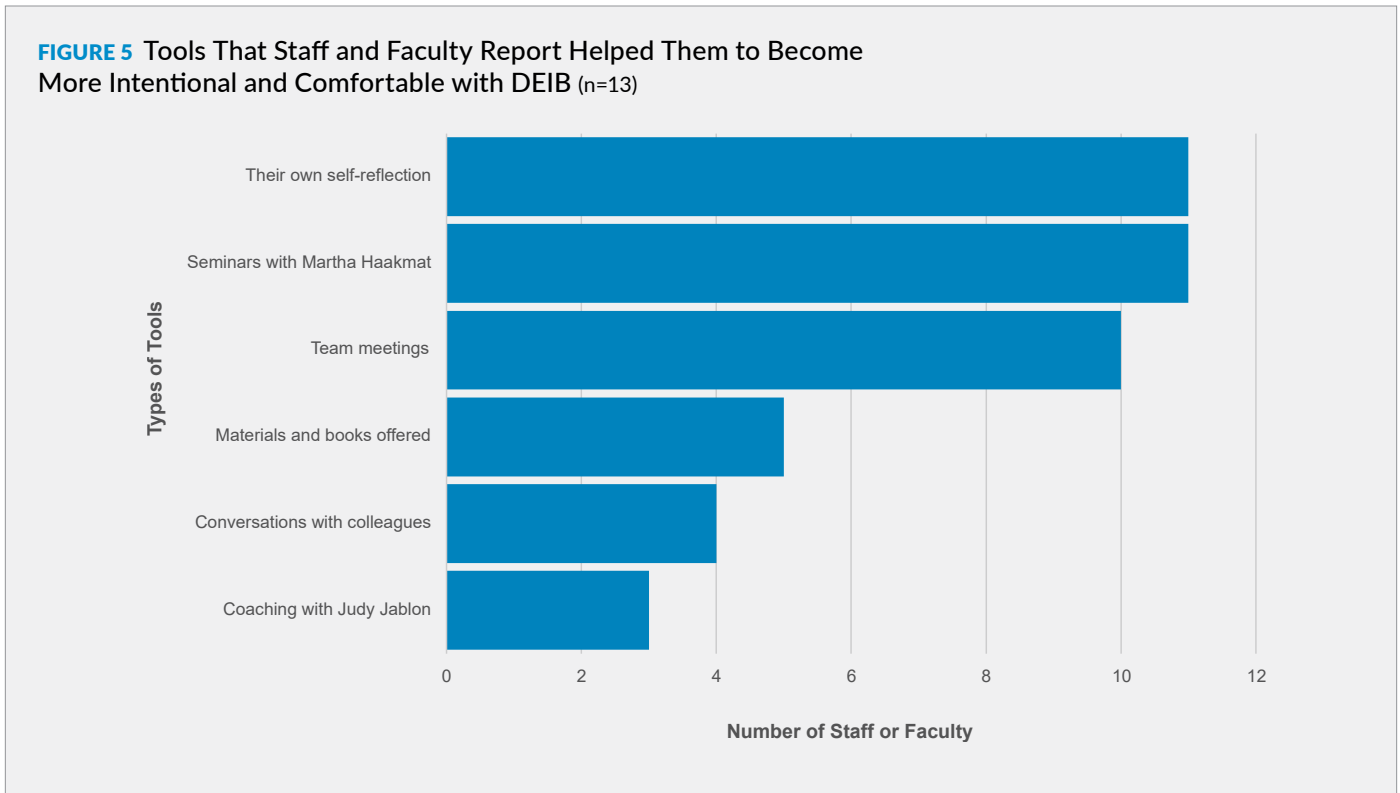
Staff reported that other tools that helped boost their intentionality and comfort with DEIB included materials and books offered by WSMS administration; Monday night Conversations with Colleagues; and small group and one-on-one coaching with Leading for Children (LFC) (TABLE 4).

Leading for Children worked with WSMS faculty and staff for the four school years between 2018 and 2022. For the 2021–2022 school year, LFC focused on providing DEIB support through Leading for Children’s monthly convenings of Optimistic Leadership professional development. These meetings included small-group discussions with staff on LFC’s “The Five Commitments of Optimistic Leaders: A Reflective Practice Journal.” At the start of the school year, LFC introduced staff to Optimistic Leadership through a large group meeting. Six small-group conversations followed. LFC team members Judy Jablon and Nichole Parks provided one-on-one coaching upon request. Further, LFC invited faculty members of color to participate in two conversations on “Leading from Strength,” facilitated by Nichole Parks.

Faculty and staff demonstrate that their positive experience with WSMS’s DEIB professional development has impacted their engagement with and commitment to DEIB.

TABLE 4 Optimistic Leadership Professional Development Offered to WSMS Faculty by Leading for Children

MONTH	TOPICS DISCUSSED
September & October 2021	Optimism & Positivity; Identity
October 2021	Self-empowerment as leaders for children; Equitable partnerships as leaders for children; Promoting a thriving community as optimistic leaders
November 2021	Think Impact
January 2022	Self-empowerment & Equitable Partnerships
February 2022	Leading from Strength
March & April 2022	Nurturing Relationships with Colleagues, Children & Families



One hundred percent of surveyed faculty agreed that they have become more intentional and comfortable with having conversations about DEIB with the children they teach (FIGURE 6). Three out of five surveyed faculty members agreed that they felt more comfortable and intentional in leading discussions with families about the DEIB lessons that have been introduced to their children (FIGURE 7).

FIGURE 6 Surveyed Faculty Members' Level of Agreement: "I have become more intentional and comfortable with having conversations about DEIB with the children that I teach." (n=5)

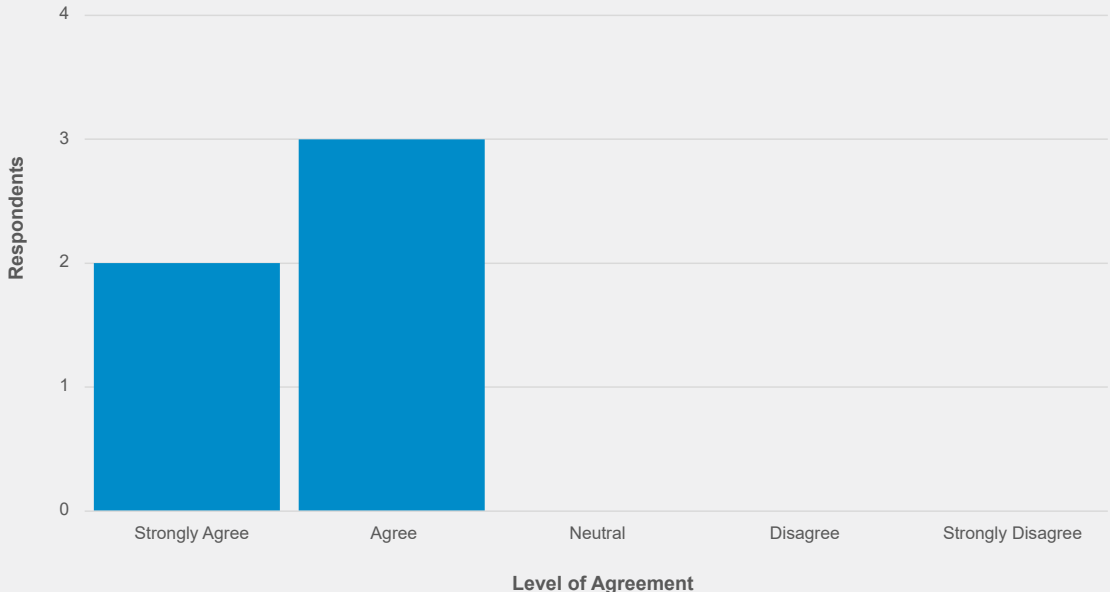
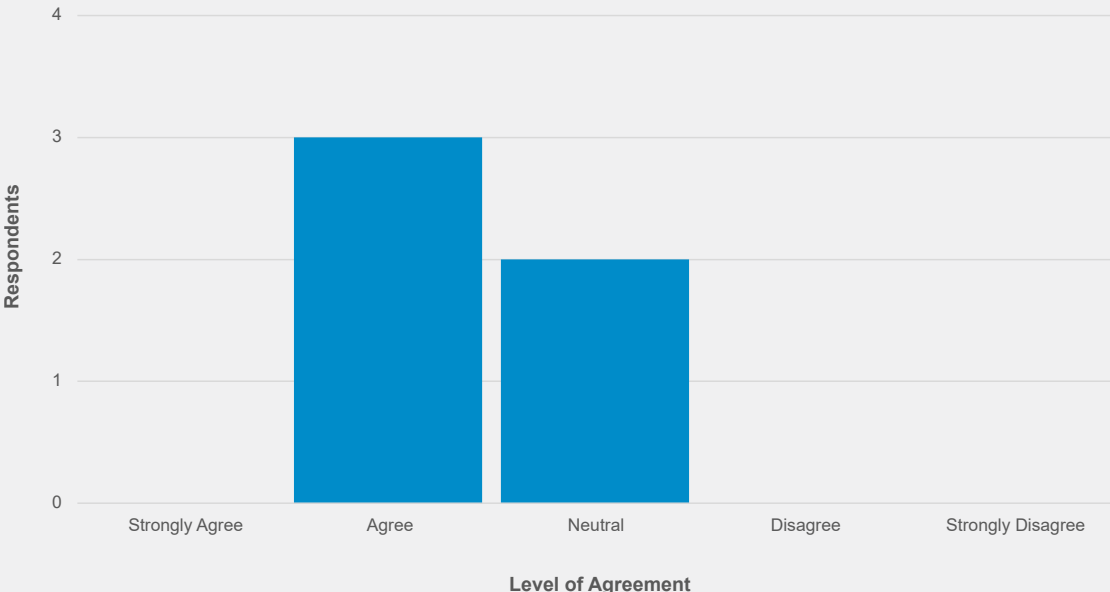


FIGURE 7 Surveyed Faculty Members' Level of Agreement: "I feel more comfortable and intentional in leading discussions with families about the DEIB lessons that have been introduced to their children." (n=5)



Ninety-two percent of surveyed WSMS faculty and staff agreed that they engage in more intentional discussions about DEIB during team meetings (FIGURE 8) and that they are more comfortable expressing themselves or asking questions in DEIB conversations with their colleagues (FIGURE 9). No surveyed WSMS team members disagreed.

FIGURE 8 Faculty & Staff’s Level of Agreement: “I engage in more intentional discussions about DEIB during team meetings.” (n=13)

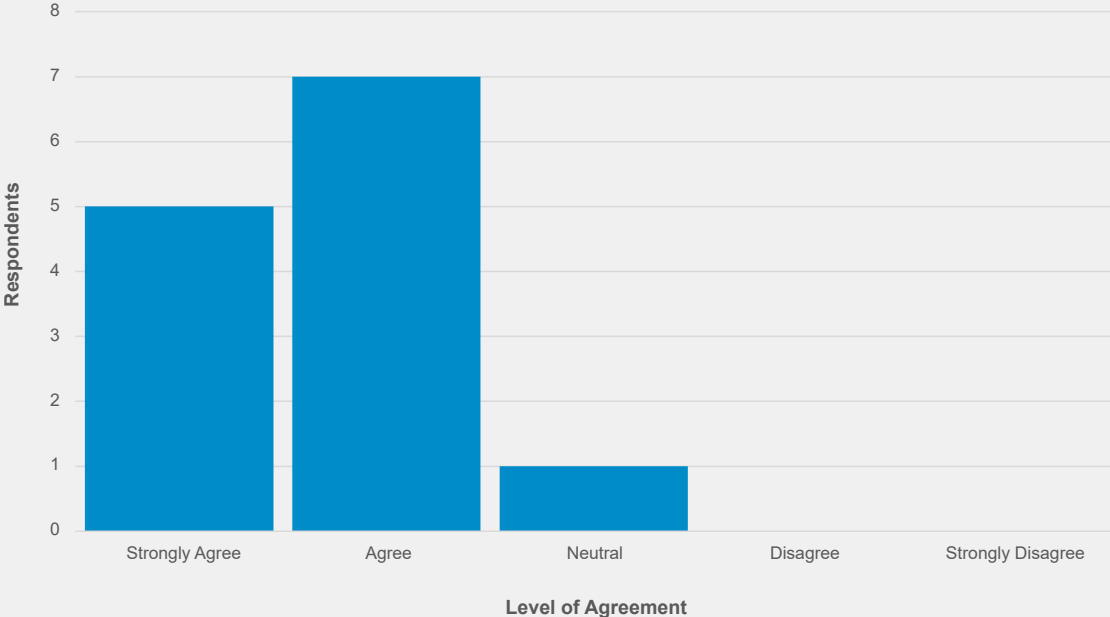
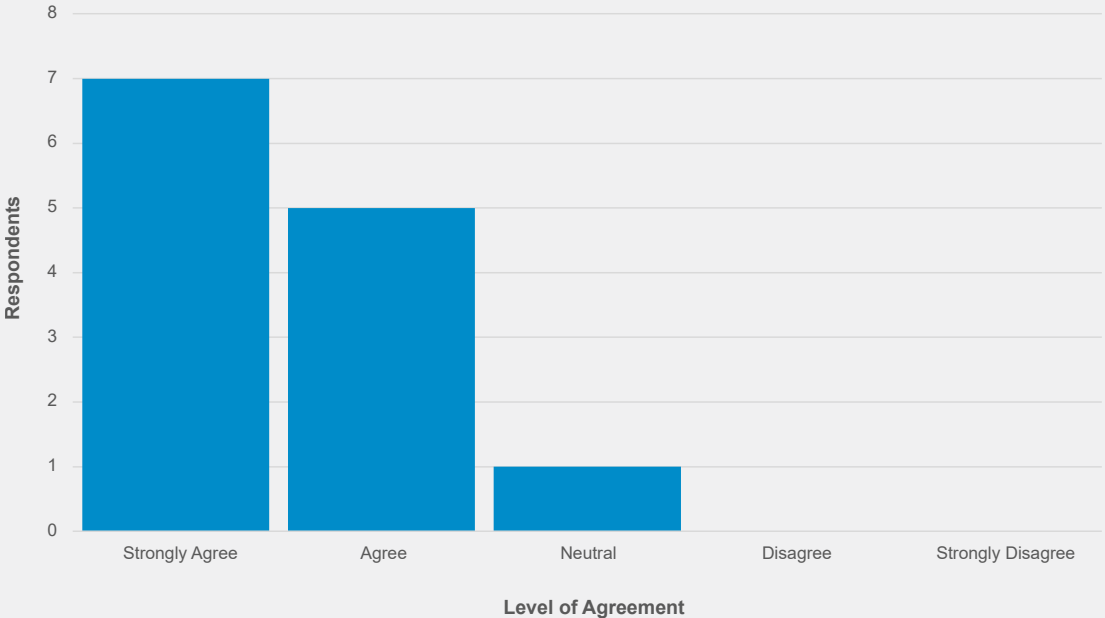


FIGURE 9 Faculty & Staff’s Level of Agreement: “I am more comfortable expressing myself or asking questions in DEIB conversations with my colleagues.” (n=13)



In reflecting on their behavior changes, one faculty member shared that the DEIB professional development she has engaged in has given her the “strength to be more open.” Another faculty member acknowledged that she has grown in her ability to listen, and she said has become “more tolerant.” Similarly, a staff member shared that the professional development has made her “more understanding and nonjudgmental and open to my own ignorance.”

Faculty and staff reported that they are better able to identify the systemic nature of discrimination, bias, and inequality. One staff member shared that her experience with the professional development helped her to keep the history and complexity of systemic discrimination in mind when understanding other’s perspectives and backgrounds. The staff member who expressed being more “open to her own ignorance” shared: “We always considered ourselves understanding diversity, in the sense of kindness and treating humans as individuals... Now we have the tools to recognize it’s not just about [that], it’s about that equity piece. And being educated on the history of the country.” This faculty member realized that accepting and trying to understand people who are different from us is not enough; instead, embracing equity and inclusion means understanding why differences exist and being aware of (and working against) systems of privilege and oppression.

Faculty and staff expressed that because of the WSMS DEIB professional development, they now feel more comfortable approaching a colleague who might not share the same race or culture to ask questions related to DEIB.

Faculty and staff reflected on how the Optimistic Leadership professional development with Leading for Children was helpful in allowing them to have more honest and productive conversations with colleagues. They reflected on the concept of thought partnership and expressed how valuable that was with colleagues in DEIB work.

Through the work with Leading for Children, faculty members reflected on how there are “always two sides to a story.” One faculty or staff member shared that we “must learn from one another and teach each other rather than judge.” In turn, she felt like she operated from a place of better judgment.

One faculty or staff member reflected on her understanding that her colleague doesn’t “need to fix” a difficult concept “or make it better for me.” Instead, she felt comfortable entering the conversation because she knew the other colleague shared the understanding that this was “complicated work.” In turn, she felt comfortable asking for her colleague’s opinion

on whether she was interpreting and understanding situations appropriately. Other staff and faculty echoed those sentiments. “We work together to learn how to become comfortable,” a faculty or staff member shared.

WSMS faculty and staff demonstrate that DEIB has become an engrained lens since they deepened their engagement with DEIB professional development. One member of WSMS’s faculty and staff reflected positively on an experience in which a colleague identified a stereotype portrayed in a toy that the school purchased and refused the toy in the classroom. The individual was pleased that the faculty member identified the stereotype and remarked, “I don’t believe that this would have been our awareness before the work we are doing.”

Faculty and staff with certain deeply embedded cultural backgrounds discussed their unique experience engaging with WSMS’s DEIB professional development. One faculty or staff member reported learning about the systemic nature of discrimination, bias, and violence from the professional development she received at WSMS. Another faculty member shared that she “come[s] from a culture where there’s a lot of things you don’t say” and this professional development helped her to be more comfortable talking about subjects related to DEIB. She said, “it opens the door for you to be sensitive and be vulnerable to tell your story.” She went on to share that now, she and “teachers like me that have come from a different culture... have more motivation... [to] bring our own culture in... and put ourselves more out there to share our story.” She described her involvement in DEIB work as more “active” since participating in WSMS’s DEIB professional development.

Evidence of professional and personal change was also identified in the survey results. Among current and alumni surveyed parents, 58% believed that the behaviors and practices of WSMS faculty and staff have been positively impacted by DEIB activities. Fifteen percent of surveyed current and alumni parents felt unsure about the influence of DEIB activities upon faculty and staff, whereas twenty percent felt that the impact was neutral (FIGURE 10).

WSMS Embeds DEIB into its Organizational Culture

In addition to offering specific professional development activities, WSMS is also building an organizational culture in which faculty and staff are given the tools and opportunity to engage in self-reflection and intellectual development. Faculty and staff report feeling willing to approach fellow colleagues to talk through issues related to diversity, inclusion, and race, and that WSMS is a safe place to do so.

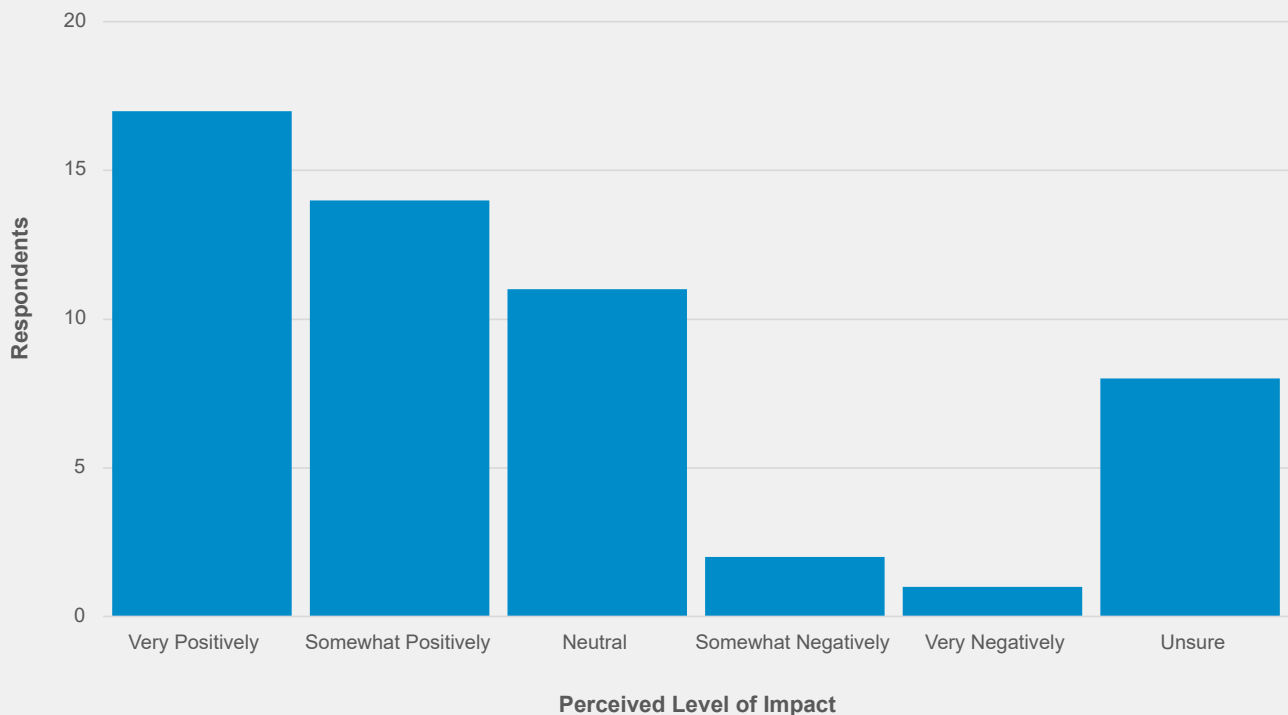
This openness to dialogue was especially apparent in the Professional Review Process. Throughout this process, WSMS encourages staff and faculty to engage in deep reflection about strong, positive relationships and meaningful interactions. Questions that guide WSMS faculty and staff's self-reflection touch on topics such as self-awareness, supporting successful relationships and interactions with children, nurturing effective interpersonal and communication

skills with all members of the school community, and how the individual contributes to a welcoming, inclusive school environment.

One faculty member shared that the DEIB professional development she engaged in at WSMS has helped her to “think better.” She reflected that her respect for other backgrounds has grown. At the same time, she has learned to take things less personally because “everyone is learning.” The faculty member went on to share that “as she goes through her own journey,” she also is “helping children go through their journey of processing their emotions.” She reflected on the experience as being rewarding and said that it has made her happy in work and in life.

Similarly, faculty and staff feel comfortable directly asking families questions about diversity, whereas they might have shied away from the opportunity in the past. One faculty member reflected on an experience in which a child in her classroom had a birth mother other than her parents. “I asked what language they use when talking about her birth mom, and they appreciated me asking this question.” Although this faculty member “grew up thinking it was rude to ask those questions,” this experience reinforced to her that asking questions like these would create a more open relationship between her and the student and their family.

FIGURE 10 Extent that Current and Alumni Parents Feel the Behaviors and Practices of Faculty and Staff Have Been Impacted by DEIB Activities (n=53)



Current and alumni families also identified an organizational culture reflective of DEIB. They resoundingly shared that they observed WSMS faculty and staff to be committed to DEIB and accessible to receiving feedback. Throughout the evaluation, all current and alumni families who weighed in on this idea agreed that they believed that WSMS faculty and staff were authentically engaged in DEIB and putting their best effort to engage in DEIB activities with children. Current and alumni parents felt comfortable discussing ideas related to DEIB or giving feedback related to specific DEIB concepts with the adults in their child’s classroom.

When asked how WSMS’s DEIB activities impacted the interactions and engagement between current and alumni families and WSMS’s faculty and administrative staff, 60% of surveyed stakeholders expressed that engagement was positively impacted, with half of those stakeholders (30%) believing that the impact was very positive. Thirty-five percent of stakeholders believed that WSMS’s DEIB activities had a neutral impact. Less than five percent of stakeholders expressed that engagement between families and faculty and staff had been negatively impacted as a result of DEIB activities (FIGURE 11).

Moreover, 92% of surveyed staff and faculty believed that students’ learning and growth had been impacted by DEIB activities (FIGURE 12). Multiple team members talked about how efforts have been made to help the children feel “seen,” “represented,” and “included,” and noted that the school has made intentional investments in time and resources to

facilitate that. Another member of WSMS’s faculty and staff shared that now, “Children see themselves in books, classroom materials, and activities.” One member of WSMS’s faculty and staff observed that it “evokes confidence and security” within children when they feel a deep sense of belonging within their classroom.

FIGURE 12 Whether Faculty and Staff Believe WSMS Students’ Learning and Growth Have Been Impacted by DEIB Activities (n=13)

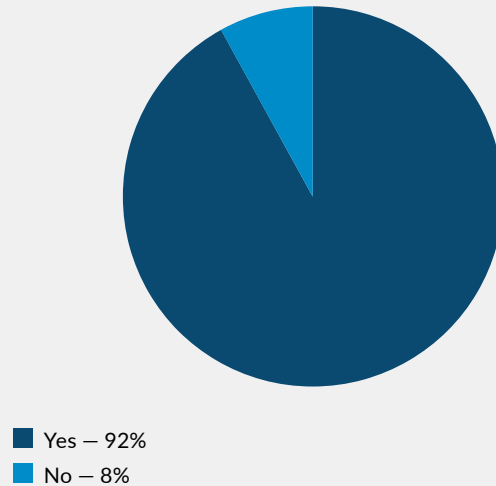
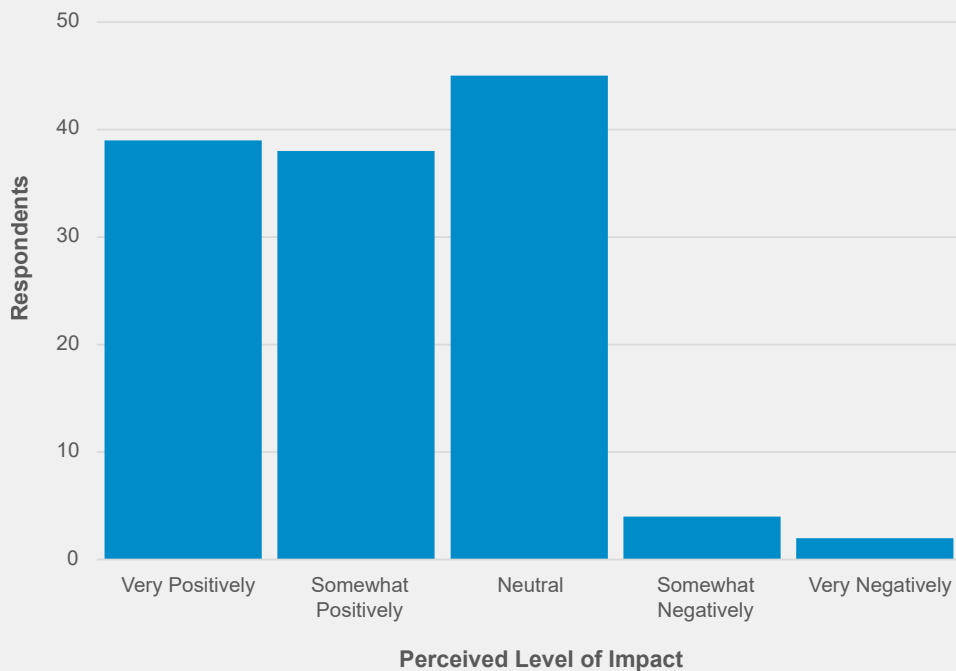


FIGURE 11 Extent that Stakeholders Feel WSMS’ DEIB Activities Impacted the Interaction and Engagement Between Families and Faculty and Staff (n=128)



WSMS faculty and staff also expressed that they have observed positive growth amongst their colleagues. Multiple faculty and staff members shared that faculty members are “more comfortable” both “broaching [DEIB-related] subjects that might formerly have been avoided” and when responding to “questions about similarities and differences, [such as] differences in skin color, hair, [and] families.” By embedding DEIB into the fabric of the organizational culture, WSMS has “invited” their employees to “embark on DEIB lessons and practices,” and as a result, team members are “more willing” to engage in DEIB work deeply and meaningfully.

Opportunity to Bridge Learning

While data indicates that faculty and staff have benefited from the professional development efforts offered by WSMS, some faculty and staff members did express an area for future growth. Some WSMS team members shared that although they have grown a great deal in their own intellectual processing and engagement with DEIB, an unfilled gap in their DEIB skills is how to adapt DEIB conversations to effectively work with young children. “They are giving us lots of tools... [to] talk about racism with little kids... but I feel personally... there’s a gap between what we are learning – which is very enlightening for adults – but we need more help with adapting lessons for really young kids. It’s a really sensitive matter.”

Faculty and staff members acknowledged that they received a great deal of books and tools on DEIB from WSMS. They spoke about a “long worksheet with a lot of questions” which was provided to faculty to spark conversations and activities with children. However, some faculty members are looking for more tactical, tangible ways to deliver developmentally appropriate DEIB curriculum to early learners. They are also looking for specific strategies to engage in the variety of sensitive conversations that children may bring up.

Some WSMS faculty and staff members expressed that they had more work to do to feel comfortable addressing difficult topics with children. Just as families expressed concern about how to handle their children asking difficult concepts at home following what they learned at school, members of the WSMS faculty and staff expressed concern with how to handle difficult follow-up questions in the classroom environment. One member of WSMS faculty and staff shared, “I don’t feel like I have enough tools to approach those conversations with the kids.” The team member expressed their carefulness with “every single word” thus far. They expressed awareness of the sensitivity of the situation and shared that they wanted to be sure to respond in a way which did not upset families.

Another member of the WSMS faculty and staff expressed similar sentiments. “Literature is spectacular,” they said, “but beyond reading the book and trying to explore it, going beyond that is a very sensitive matter.” They expressed that they often felt unsure about what is appropriate to discuss with kids and what is not.

Recommendations

Bridge adult learning to approaches with children

Consider building out professional development opportunities that help bridge the learning that adults are experiencing so that they have the tools to approach challenging and/or sensitive conversations around DEIB with young learners in a consistent way.

Leverage DEIB approach to enrich values-based curriculum

Given the success with which WSMS has embedded DEIB into its community, current and alumni families noted that the school has an opportunity to leverage the same approach with which it delivers DEIB work to establish additional curriculum that promotes important guiding values. For instance, if WSMS wanted to dedicate effort to teaching children about the importance of respecting the environment, it could take a similar approach to what it has done so far with DEIB: adding picture books, developing curriculum activities, and teaching children about recycling, conserving resources, and valuing nature. In the same way as the DEIB initiative, WSMS could intentionally ensure that it capitalizes on all opportunities to teach children about environmentalism. One example is having picture signs in the bathroom showing how using less paper towels or running the water for a shorter time helps the environment.

Capitalize on enrichment opportunities to further embed DEIB

WSMS has dedicated enrichment specialists who go from classroom to classroom to deliver lessons in music and movement. Some stakeholders recommended that to further embed DEIB, these specialists could offer more lesson topics with a DEIB lens. Some suggestions included incorporating music and dances from different cultural traditions into these lessons.

Observation 2: WSMS’s commitment to DEIB differentiates it as an institution and a leader in the educational landscape.

Across the board, current and alumni families agree that WSMS holds an authentic commitment to DEIB and is an exemplar organization for addressing systemic inequality. This level of commitment was broadly recognized by stakeholders as unique, not just for an independent school or for an early childhood learning institution, but for any organization.

Deepening an Established Commitment

The breadth of DEIB activities in WSMS’s curriculum library and community activity demonstrates that WSMS’s DEIB culture has been intentionally cultivated and integrated over time. One alumni parent shared, “We chose this school because they were doing this work six years ago [in 2016]. This is not trendy or new for them.” Similarly, a WSMS administrator reflected that “diversity has always been at the core of WSMS since its founding.” WSMS deepened their efforts to identify and pursue opportunities to deepen their DEIB work beginning in the mid-2010s.

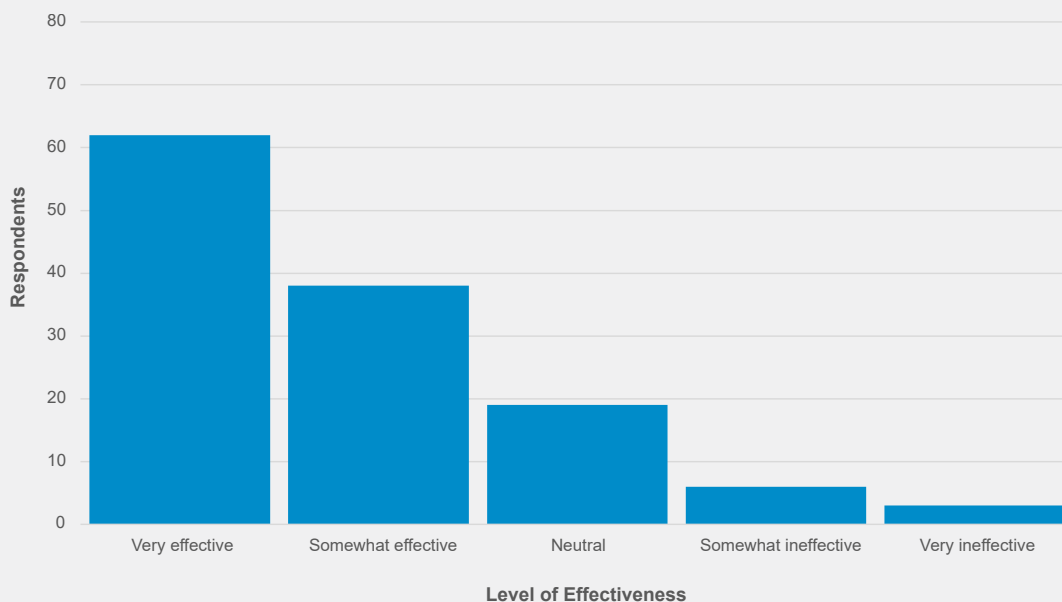
The effects of WSMS’s commitment to DEIB are demonstrated throughout all aspects of the school community. Comparing school materials from the mid-2010s to 2021 and 2022 demonstrates the marked dedication to deepening the WSMS community’s commitment to DEIB over time. The WSMS faculty and staff’s professional review process has intentionally integrated the commitment to identifying, learning about, and celebrating children’s unique identities and creating an

inclusive environment for students and team members alike. Elements of identity and diversity are explicitly presented and explored in the 2022 Professional Review Process. A staff member who has been a long-time member of the WSMS community shared that WSMS had always cultivated a diverse school environment, “but it has gotten more diverse over the years.” They felt “amazed at how the DEIB work has expanded.”

Current and alumni families shared that WSMS has “always been ahead of the curve” insofar as their DEIB activities and programming and “this is rare.” In reflecting on the racial justice movement that reached a critical point in this country in 2020, one alumni parent shared, “Many [schools] have used 2020 as a catalyst to improve. It says something [that WSMS already had] something in place and [wanted to] enhance it and make sure we’re progressing.” Another alumni parent, whose now nine-year-old child attended WSMS for preschool, agreed: “This type of work started much prior to 2020.” In contrast to how many organizations established a new, stronger commitment to DEIB starting in 2020, the WSMS community already had a solid foundation in place and was already engaged in goal-oriented, continuous improvement. WSMS simply utilized its existing structure to deepen its work.

Survey results also confirmed the WSMS community’s well-established commitment to DEIB. More than three-quarters of survey respondents believe that WSMS’s DEIB efforts are effective, with about half of survey respondents believing that WSMS’s DEIB efforts are “very effective.” Fifteen percent of respondents felt that WSMS’s efforts were neither effective nor ineffective (FIGURE 13). Forty-three respondents (forty percent) shared that their child engages and is more curious about DEIB topics with them and with others as a result of their time at WSMS.

FIGURE 13 Surveyed Current Parents, Alumni Parents, Faculty, Staff, Current Board Members, and Former Board Members’ Perception of How Effective WSMS is in DEIB (n=128)



Furthering the Work

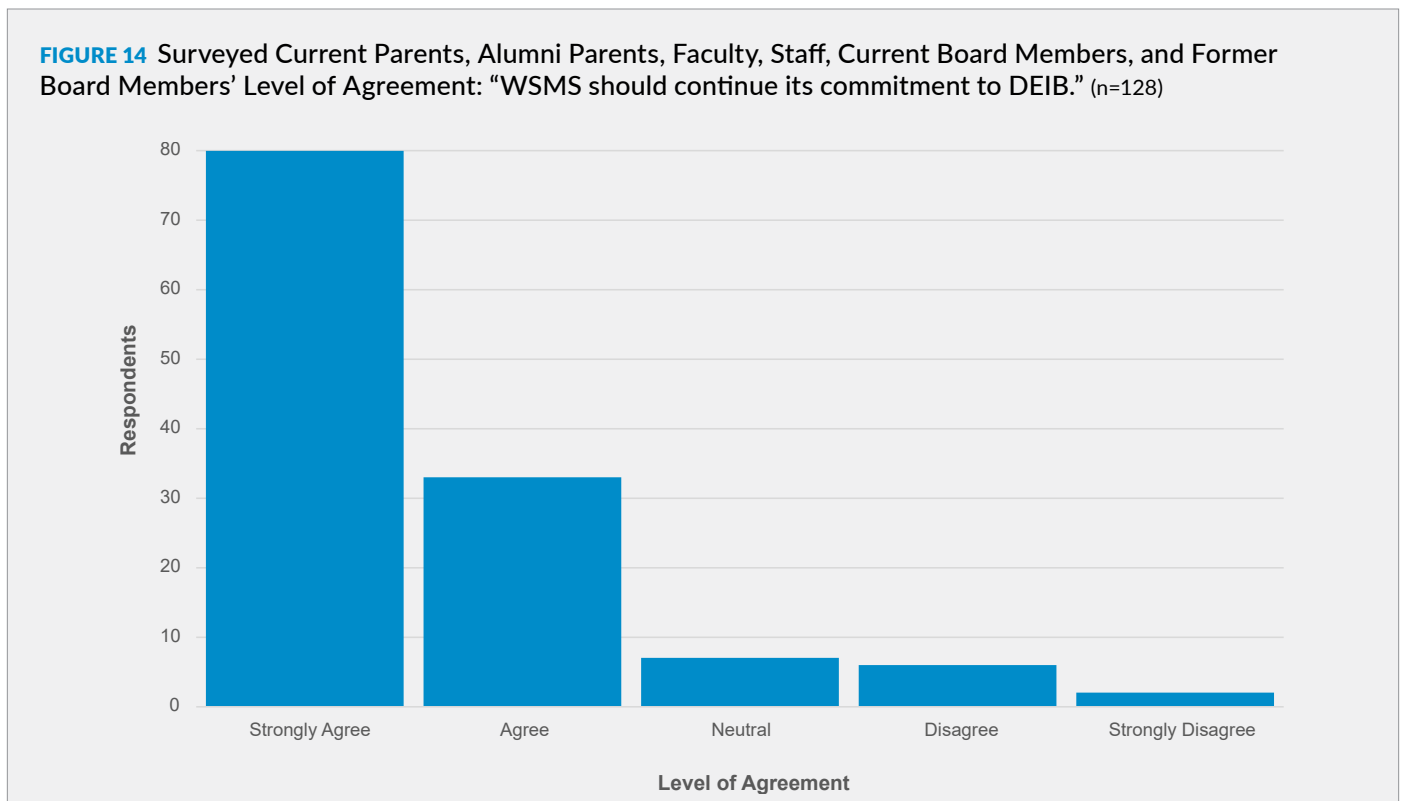
Survey data indicates that WSMS's DEIB commitment is highly valued by the large majority of the WSMS community. Two-thirds of stakeholders strongly agreed that WSMS should continue its commitment to DEIB. Overall, 88% of surveyed stakeholders endorsed WSMS's continuing its commitment to DEIB. Six percent of respondents expressed that they disagreed that WSMS should continue its commitment to DEIB and five percent were neutral (FIGURE 14).

Stakeholders reported that they appreciated that development opportunities were offered to the entire community and would like them to continue. WSMS engaged DEI expert Martha Haakmat to offer workshops to not only its faculty and staff, but also its Board of Directors and its families. WSMS sponsored sessions led by Ms. Haakmat on June 9, 2020 to help families learn how to talk with young children about racism. Additional parent conversations were hosted in November 2020, October 2021, November 2021, and January 2022.

WSMS also engaged Ms. Haakmat to hold professional development workshops for WSMS's Board of Directors. Two Board workshops were held on February 24, 2021 and March 11, 2021.

TABLE 4 DEIB Professional Development for WSMS's Board of Directors

DATE	GOALS
2/24/2021	To orient the Board to its role in antiracism strategic thinking and planning
3/11/2021	To articulate trustee support for DEI and to move Board equity work from words to actions



Board Impact

All current Board members surveyed expressed that they believed progress has been made toward the Board's specific DEIB goals, with more than one-third of surveyed Board members expressing that "significant" progress has been made (FIGURE 15). More than three-quarters of surveyed Board members reported that they have a firm understanding of the DEIB goals for the Board committee of which they are part (FIGURE 16).

One Board member shared that the DEIB professional development that WSMS offered to the Board of Directors helped them to develop "deeper connections" and "better understanding" with their fellow colleagues on the Board. A Board member also shared that the DEIB work helped them to consider the impacts of decisions upon all enrolled children and families.

FIGURE 15 Current and Former Directors' Opinions on Level of Progress Made Toward Board-Specific DEIB Goals (n=8)

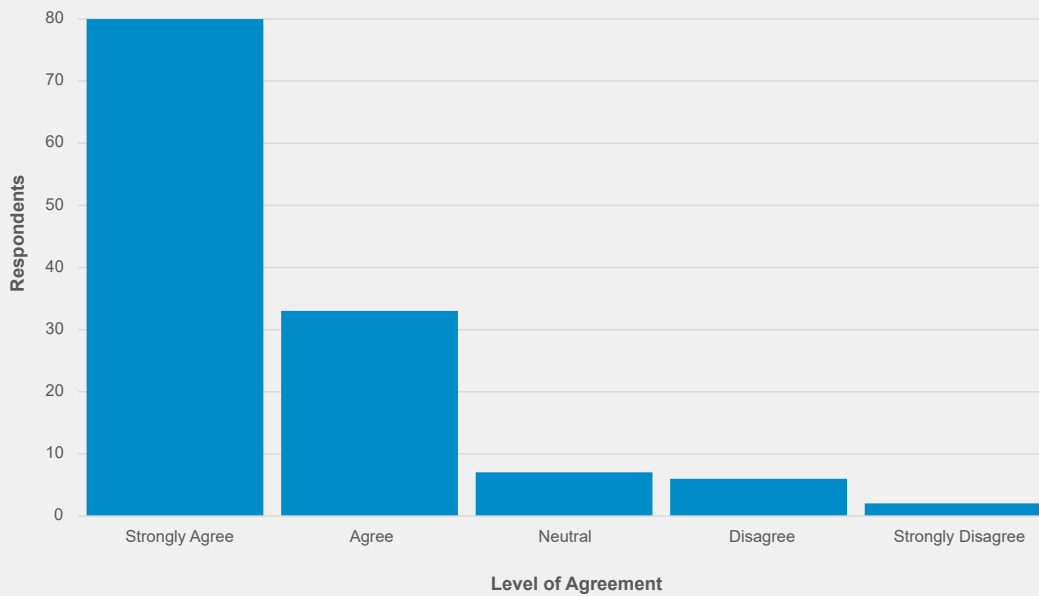
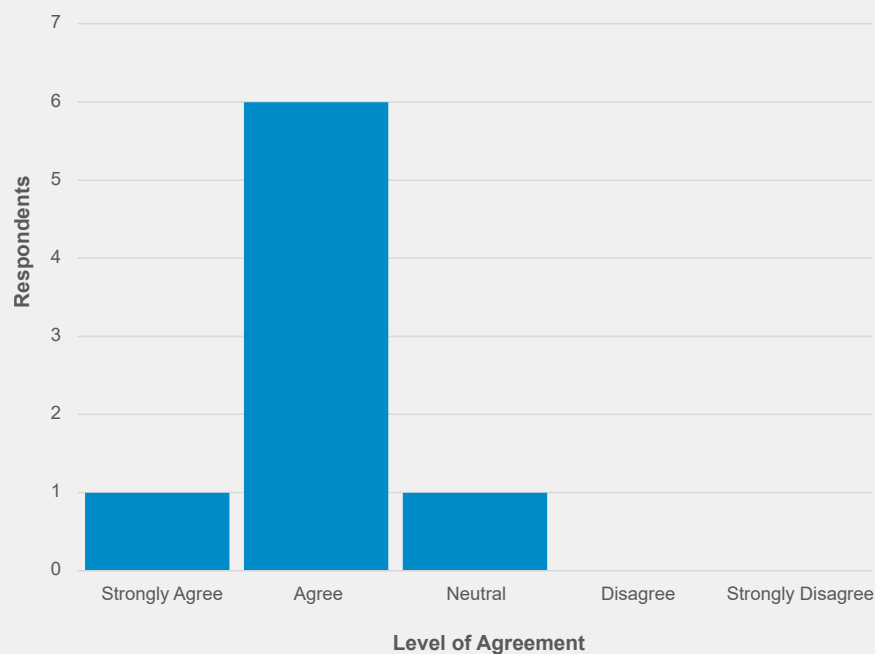
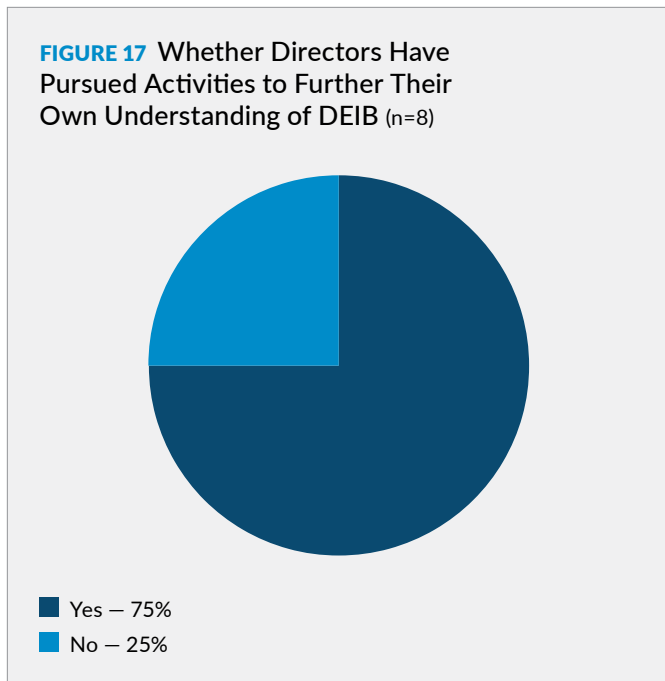


FIGURE 16 Directors' Level of Agreement: "I have a firm understanding of my committee-specific DEIB goals." (n=8)



Board members largely demonstrated dedication to personally engaging with DEIB work. Three-quarters of surveyed Directors reported that they pursued activities to further their own understanding of DEIB (FIGURE 17).

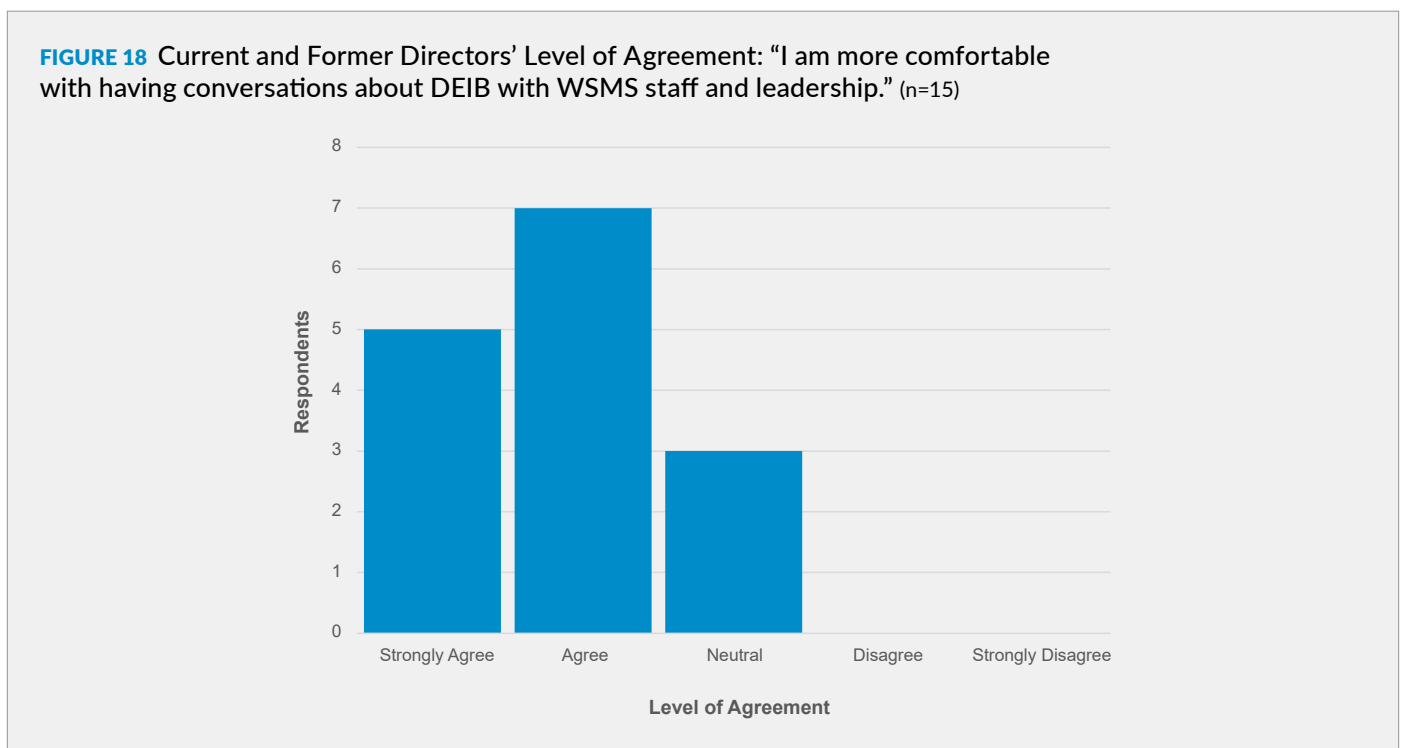


The effort and intentionality put into deepening the Board of Directors' attention to DEIB has reaped tangible benefits. **Four out of five** members of the Board of Directors (present and former) reported being more comfortable having conversations about DEIB with WSMS staff and leadership (FIGURE 18).

WSMS's commitment to DEIB factors into families' choice to enroll.

Current and alumni families reported choosing to enroll their early learners with WSMS because of its dedication to DEIB. They trust in the school and its commitment to DEIB; that trust is then reinforced over time and families stay. Current and alumni parents acknowledged and appreciated that WSMS has dedicated resources to introduce and integrate DEIB practices within their community.

Many families shared that they chose WSMS over other preschools specifically because of its strong practices encouraging diversity. Many parents acknowledged that "the bar is low in New York City" for options for independent preschools that do a good job at embodying DEIB values. One parent shared, "when we were looking at schools in New York, there's so many wonderful schools who touted they're a diverse and inclusive space, but when you went to the schools, you didn't observe or see it." Another parent shared that WSMS's commitment to DEIB was the primary component that differentiated it from other private preschools in New York City.



Many parents expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of rich cultural diversity in the classroom at other preschools and were satisfied with diversity among staff, faculty, and students at WSMS. When exploring preschools, parents found that other preschools enrolled children who reflected the demographics of the children in their neighborhood. “Enrollment-wise, West Side is a place that really cares about racial and ethnic diversity of their student body,” a parent said. WSMS differentiates itself from other private preschools in New York City because of its commitment to embedding DEIB into the fabric of the WSMS experience.

One parent shared, “[WSMS] is at the forefront of the work [within] early childhood education, even in New York City. I think that’s a scary place to be sometimes, especially with the national conversation happening now... This is not trendy or new for them. They understand why it is important to talk about this for all children in the classroom, not just the marginalized children, and for all perspectives in diversity. They are doing really great work, taking smart risks. They are working hard to keep the entire community engaged and involved in what they are doing. I know a ton of early childhood education schools in New York City and most of them are not doing this work at the level they are.”

Parents also recognized and appreciated the economic diversity among the WSMS community that WSMS has intentionally cultivated. “[WSMS] has a good economic diversity component,” one parent shared. “We talk a lot about race and culture, that kind of identity. It is important to recognize economic diversity [also].”

Many families of color spoke about how they felt most comfortable enrolling their child at WSMS. One parent shared that she had experienced significant racism when she was a child and did not want her son to have that experience — especially before he was able to process the concept. This parent shared that she had “deep conversations” during the admissions interview about how WSMS would “address and embrace DEI.” Based on conversations, this parent trusted that WSMS would serve as an inclusive educational home for her child, and this trust was reinforced by her family’s experience as time went on.

The sense of belonging that the school emanates because of its DEIB work was a major draw for parents. A parent shared, “Having a safe space at school is critical” and that “the level of inclusion and visibility [WSMS] gives to all children is key.” Another parent, who was not born in the U.S., shared, “For me, promoting the DEI is really important.” The environment at WSMS allows her daughter to “feel the sense of belong. She always feels included. [She] is very happy. She always gets playdates from other parents. She feels part of a big family.”

Some parents reported that one of the reasons that they chose to enroll their child at WSMS was because they were aware that faculty and staff were engaging in DEIB conversations through professional development.

Offering a Sense of Belonging

Families who hold identities that have been historically excluded or marginalized report that they felt a sense of belonging at WSMS. Throughout the data collection process, a number of individuals self-disclosed identities which have historically been faced with marginalization or oppression.

One parent who self-disclosed as LGBTQ+ shared that to their knowledge, they were the only family in the classroom with parents of the same gender, but they were never reminded of that because they always felt a sense of belonging. Another parent had a different experience; they were aware that there was another family in their child’s classroom with two parents of the same gender and even saw picture books in the classroom depicting and normalizing families with two moms or two dads.

Similarly, families who received financial aid to attend WSMS agreed that they felt like they belonged. One parent shared that WSMS made their financial aid status “a confidential piece of a family’s profile.” Another parent shared that because the family used “financial aid, it was important to feel like we were not alone. The overall aura of the school was that it was inclusive. We felt drawn there because of that. We felt like it lived that. We always felt like we belonged.” A parent recounted that WSMS provided complimentary tickets to the annual fundraiser and fall fair to the student, their parents, and the student’s siblings. The parent shared, “[WSMS] understands that there are extraneous expenses that come for schools that aren’t tuition-based. We were definitely made to feel [like we belonged].”

Similarly, WSMS offers programming that demonstrates consideration for families that need child care during and around working hours. The late afternoon program (LAP), vacation schools, and summer camp provide an option for child care for families without stay-at-home parents or alternative child care options. One parent explained that WSMS is “really cognizant of what having no school means for people who don’t have back-up child care.” They reflected, “So many nursery schools don’t offer that, and they don’t work for families like my own, so having these programs is a commitment to working families without other child care means... It really does make a big impact [in] making this school an option for many different types of families.”

Admissions

Throughout the evaluation, several stakeholders pointed to the admissions process as a cornerstone of WSMS's DEIB identity. A staff member familiar with the admissions process shared that there is "absolute intentionality" throughout the admissions process. WSMS leadership focuses on "creating a community that is true to our school's mission."

Current and alumni families of students reflected on their child's admissions process fondly. A parent shared that in the initial meeting with the school, she "got to share about what our family was, what made us unique, in all ways, not just racially. We got to talk about the hopes and dreams [we have] for [our child]." This experience made this parent feel like WSMS faculty and staff understood her family's unique background and could help her to guide her child's development in the way she wanted.

A staff member who reflected on WSMS's expanded focus on DEIB over the years shared that the admissions process played a key role in the student body becoming more diverse.

WSMS Student Body Quick Stats

59% students of color (2021-2022)

44% of students are multilingual (2021-2022)

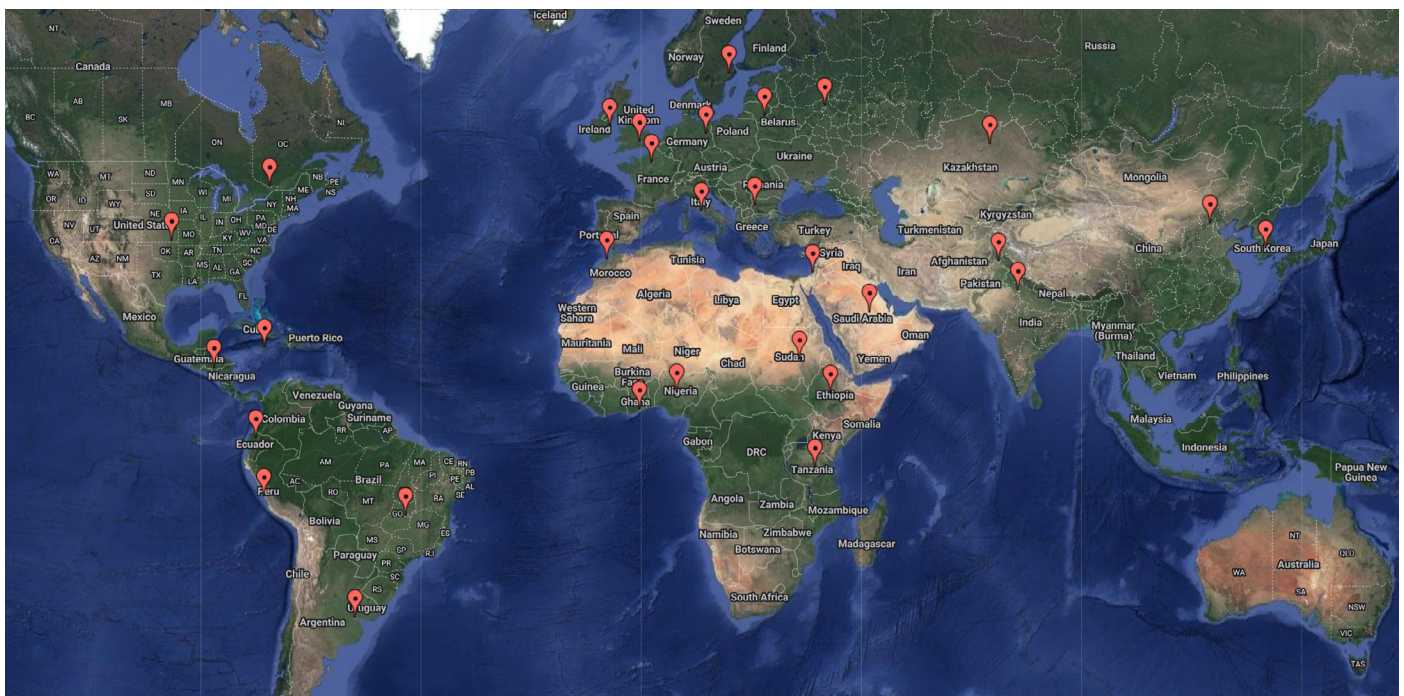


Parents of enrolled students were born in **29** countries (2021-2023)

In the 2021-2022 school year, 59% of families identified as either multiracial (22%), Asian (16%), African American (13%), East Asian (8%), or Latinx (2%).

WSMS focuses effort on cultivating a student body that represents diverse cultures. Between enrollment for the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years, parents of enrolled WSMS children were born in 28 countries other than the U.S.: Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Ecuador, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Ghana, Honduras, Italy, India, Ireland, Israel, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Korea, Lithuania, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Sweden, and Tanzania (FIGURE 19).

FIGURE 19 Map Representing the Countries of Birth of Parents of Enrolled Children (2021-2023)



Among the 2021–2022 student body, 81 children (44%) collectively speak 25 languages in addition to English. Among enrolled families, 9% of children speak English as a second language.

The commitment to diversity does not stop at a cultural level. WSMS maintains an intersectional view of diversity that includes integrating families in the WSMS community who come from different socioeconomic statuses and communities in New York City. Among the students admitted for the 2022–2023 school year, families reside in 21 different zip codes. All WSMS parents who shared their opinion during data collection stated that they believed that WSMS had the most diverse student body among independent preschools in New York City.

FIGURE 20 WSMS's admissions poster depicts a diversity of children in their student body.



Financial Aid Program

WSMS is committed to offering financial aid to families who would otherwise be unable to enroll their child at WSMS. Over five school years (2016 to 2020), 126 students received 196 scholarships to attend WSMS. Since 2012, financial aid has consistently been awarded to between 16% and 20% of WSMS families each year.

The school community expressed a shared commitment to raising money for the school's financial aid fund so that the school can continue to offer places for families of mixed socioeconomic backgrounds.

One family noted that their awareness of WSMS's financial aid program "greatly increased our participation" in volunteering and "willingness to donate. We knew the funds were going especially for the financial aid program and kids from underprivileged backgrounds."

Some feedback was received about how different socioeconomic statuses can pose barriers to children building relationships. One stakeholder reflected that many WSMS families are financially privileged and able to engage in exclusive activities that might not be within reach for middle-class or financially disadvantaged families, such as going on certain vacations or attending certain events. This parent shared that families tend to befriend other families of a similar socioeconomic background, which then "institutes divides among themselves and among their children." This presents an area of opportunity for future DEIB efforts and programming.

Classroom Placement Practices

There was some discussion among stakeholders of WSMS's intentionality in how children are assigned to classrooms at the start of the year. WSMS makes efforts to place children with similar family identities in the same classroom so that they can develop relationships with children with whom they may share similarities. Efforts also are made to place those groups of children in classrooms with staff and faculty who share similar identities or backgrounds. This strategy is not explicitly discussed but instead embedded in the intentional approach that WSMS uses. Parents referred to this method as "windows and mirrors."

One parent shared, "There may be a classroom that leans toward more children of color, but there's a strategy behind that, so no child ever feels isolated, so those kids of color are not on an island. They're not separating out kids so there is a 'token child' in each room." Families appreciated that their child experienced "fellowship" and had a role model in the classroom.

Exmissions

Some stakeholders report that WSMS is strongly committed to helping children transition to their next academic steps.

Through the data collection process, families observed that there is a knowledge gap among families related to the admissions process to independent elementary schools. Some stakeholders implied that this knowledge gap is driven by generations of systemic racism and wealth inequality. Some families who were engrained into communities with generational wealth learned how to navigate the admissions process for independent schools through their own lived experience. Other families who did not engage in this process themselves and did not have a network of contacts who had navigated this process expressed that they needed assistance learning about it.

Upon the creation of the Parents of Children of Color affinity group (a group formed by parents seeking to connect with other parents), the first action item resulting from the first meeting was to learn more about the exmissions process. As a result, WSMS invited alumni families to discuss their own experience with the process of WSMS exmissions and admissions into independent elementary school. One interviewed parent who was involved in the first POCOC meeting and in the resulting exmissions activities shared that the exmissions discussions were incredibly meaningful for her family because they did not have the background information about the process that other families had.

WSMS partners with Early Steps, a nonprofit organization with a mission to promote racial diversity in New York City independent schools, to help children from WSMS and other New York early learning institutes navigate the application process for independent schools. One stakeholder shared that it is “a gift for families” of color when they can receive admissions and placement insight from another person of color working for an agency whose mission is to serve families and children of color. The relationship between WSMS and Early Steps creates that opportunity for the family of every WSMS child of color.

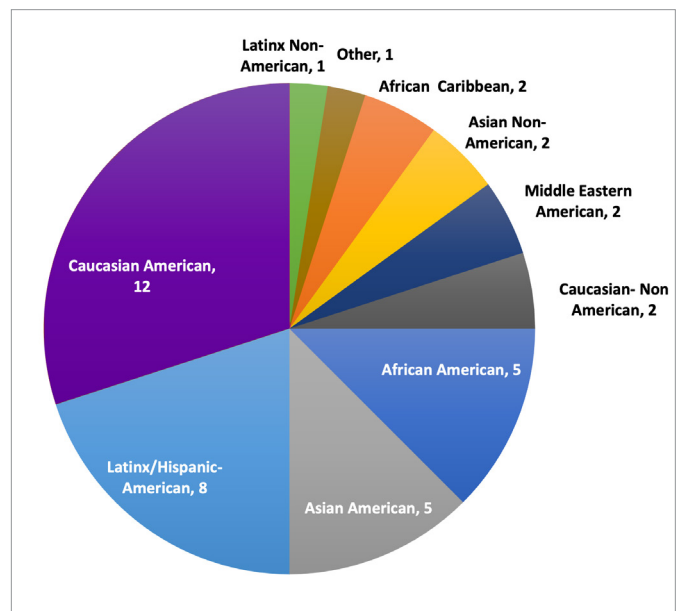
A landscape expert shared that WSMS holds an “appropriate level of appreciation for their children of color and their potential” and that differentiates WSMS as an equity leader in the New York City early childhood education setting. Throughout the family’s whole experience, from WSMS admissions to exmissions, WSMS strongly support families of color as a means to increase levels of opportunity for the child’s future.

DEIB Attracts & Retains WSMS Staff & Faculty

In addition to drawing families to the school, WSMS’s commitment to DEIB also attracts faculty and staff and serves to bolster employee retention. Staff and faculty of color feel valued knowing that their workplace focuses on DEIB and is in a state of continuous improvement. A team member shared that WSMS’s DEIB efforts was “one of the first things that attracted me” to WSMS.

WSMS faculty collectively represents 15 countries and speaks 13 languages. For the 2021-2022 school year, 70% of WSMS faculty identified as people of color or Caucasian non-Americans. The most common ethnicities represented amongst faculty are Latinx/Hispanic American (23%), African American or African Caribbean (18%), and Asian (18%). The WSMS team also includes faculty who identify as Middle Eastern and Caucasian non-American (**FIGURE 21**).

FIGURE 21 Ethnicity of WSMS Faculty 2021–2022



Families discussed how they observed WSMS’s commitment to DEIB through the diversity of staff and faculty. One parent shared, “I feel like West Side is ‘walking the walk’ and not just ‘talking the talk’ about DEI [because of]... the level of diversity amongst the teachers. Not only is it important to talk about these things and have representative materials but seeing teachers and staff members who look like them and have first-hand experience in what it means to be a majority setting.”

One parent explained that in her child’s classroom, each of the five faculty members represented five different countries. In this way, the parent’s trust in WSMS’s DEIB values was strengthened: “The classrooms were representative of what

[WSMS] stood for... They practiced what they preached.” A Board member noted that they observed a difference in the diversity among staff members now compared to five years ago.

In addition to the physical school, WSMS also offers a Teacher Education Program (TEP) for adults studying to become Montessori teachers. The TEP reviews applications from students across the world to earn credentials and to student teach at WSMS. WSMS has a satellite credentialing program in Shanghai, China in addition to local locations in New York City, Buffalo, NY, and Whitehouse Station, NJ. WSMS-TEP is authorized to permit adult learners to apply for a F-1 student visa to study in the US for the duration of their teacher education program. This is another way that WSMS intentionally capitalizes on opportunities to incorporate diversity into the fabric of their school community.

Many faculty and staff reported that they found WSMS’s level of commitment to DEIB to be unique. One staff member shared that this job was her first in which the organization focused on DEIB and reflected on how it could improve. She shared that she had never been “exposed to an organization that wants to do better and is asking all these questions... That’s amazing, especially being a minority myself.”

Other members of the WSMS faculty and staff shared similar sentiments. One team member shared, “I’ve never been a part of a school that’s focused on this [DEIB] work.”

A faculty member shared, “I feel rewarded to work for an organization that even has a DEIB mission” given her identity and values. She shared that she feels supported as a WSMS team member as a woman of color.

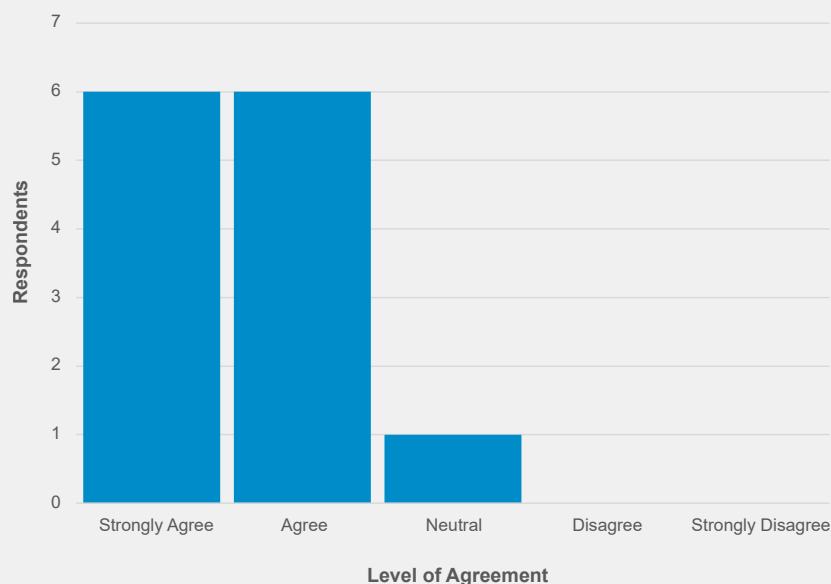
Among surveyed WSMS faculty and staff, 92% agreed that they felt like their lived experience is heard and their perspective is valued in DEIB conversations at WSMS. Nearly half expressed strong agreement (FIGURE 22).

Recommendations

Broaden the DEIB lens to include other less represented identities

WSMS’s dedication to DEIB largely began with a focus on race, ethnicity, culture, and heritage. These practices should be sustained and perpetuated. However, there are pieces of an integrated DEIB practice that could be more embedded in WSMS’s DEIB approach. For example, there is an opportunity to more fully represent able-bodiedness and differently abled people in the classroom. Further, there is room to celebrate subverting gender stereotypes and to foster children’s self-constructed gender identity and representation. Team leaders in DEIB have already taken steps to begin integrating these concepts into WSMS’s DEIB library and curriculum. For next steps, there is room to embed representation and inclusion within the in-school environment to embrace all types of identities, such as gender identity and able-bodiedness, in a developmentally appropriate manner.

FIGURE 22 Faculty and Staff’s Level of Agreement: “I feel that my lived experience is heard and my perspective is valued in DEIB conversations at WSMS.” (n=13)

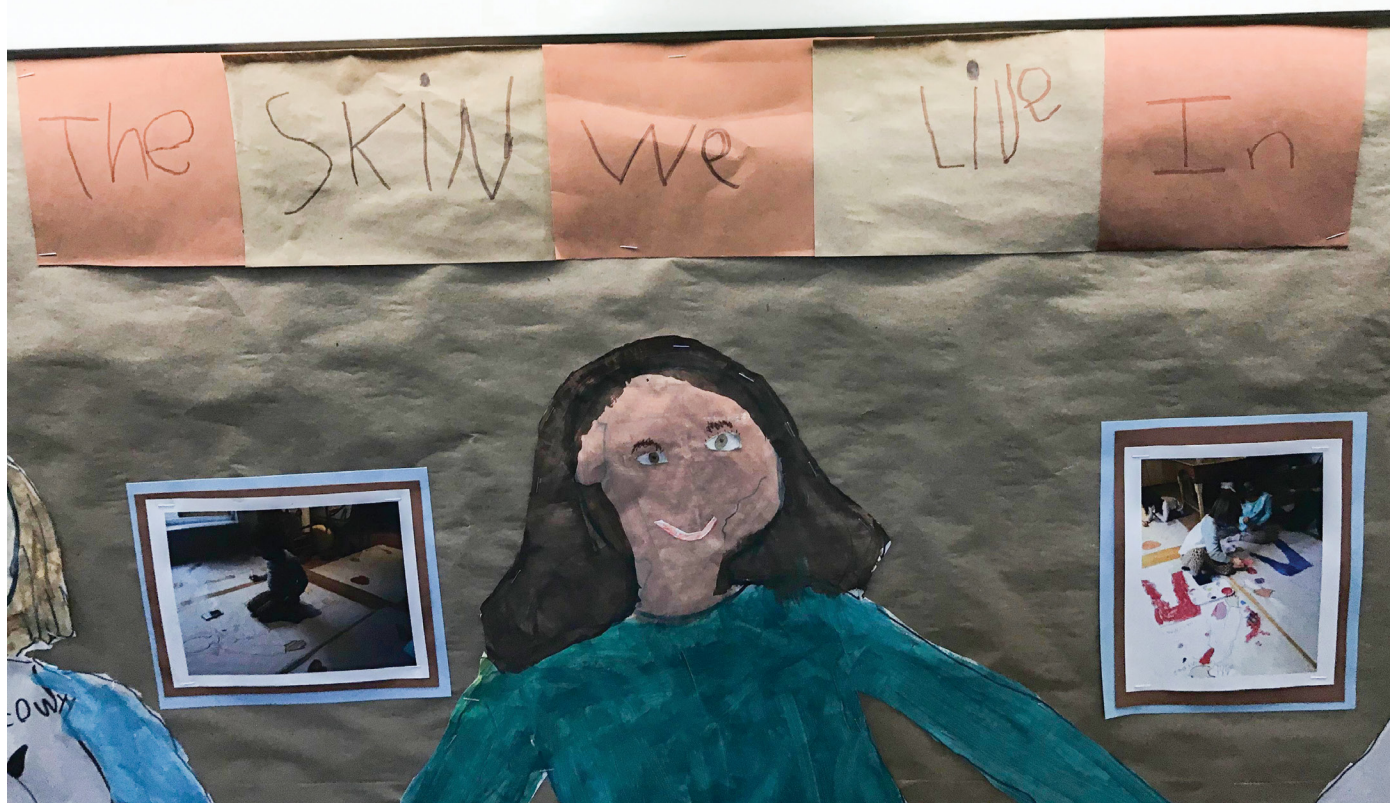


Consider ways to enhance dialogue focused on socioeconomic diversity

WSMS has taken steps to integrate socioeconomic status into its DEIB learning through literature and some curriculum. However, some stakeholders report that WSMS has an opportunity to frame socioeconomic status as a spectrum rather than a binary. They note that rather than positioning socioeconomic status in terms of soup kitchens and volunteering, there is an opportunity to embed the idea of socioeconomic privilege into a community of belonging by discussing equal respect for people from a spectrum of socioeconomic statuses. To avoid creating categories of people who help others and people who need to be helped, there could be discussions about the types of different homes and the types of environments (e.g., cities, suburbs, and rural areas, both in the U.S. and in other countries) in which people live.

Develop resources to help prepare families and children of color for their transition out of WSMS

Parents of children of color and families of color expressed great gratitude for the opportunity their child had to experience a welcoming, diverse preschool environment at WSMS. Some families expressed concern over the transition to less diverse independent primary schools. These families were looking for workshops to help prepare their children to “feel empowered” and retain their “sense of belonging” even though they might be part of a small ethnic minority in their new school. One parent and Board member shared that we want to teach the children that “you don’t undo this sense of belonging by moving to a new community.” Some stakeholders sought supports for parents to help their children through this transition and hoped that WSMS faculty could integrate this value into their lessons in school.



Observation 3:
 Deepening the home-school connection is an area of opportunity for the continued evolution of DEIB activities.

An exploration of the levels of family involvement and the direct impact that DEIB programming has had on children and families revealed a key area of opportunity for WSMS. When asked how stakeholders (including current families, alumni families, faculty, staff, current members of the Board of Directors, and former members of the Board of Directors) viewed their involvement in WSMS’s DEIB activities, 40% expressed that they felt involved, about 30% expressed that they felt neutral (neither involved nor uninvolved), and about 30% expressed that they felt uninvolved. In fact, one-quarter of these surveyed stakeholders expressed that they felt very uninvolved (FIGURE 23).

Despite varying levels of involvement in DEIB activities themselves, these surveyed stakeholders expressed that WSMS’s DEIB programs and activities have had far-reaching impacts upon their families and others within the school community. Fifty-four survey respondents (50%) expressed that they felt more comfortable having conversations about DEIB topics with their child because of WSMS’s DEIB programming. Forty-three respondents (40%) shared that their child engages and is more curious about DEIB topics with them and with others. Thirty-six respondents (one-third) expressed that they feel more comfortable having conversations about DEIB with their child’s teacher because of WSMS’s DEIB programming (FIGURE 24).

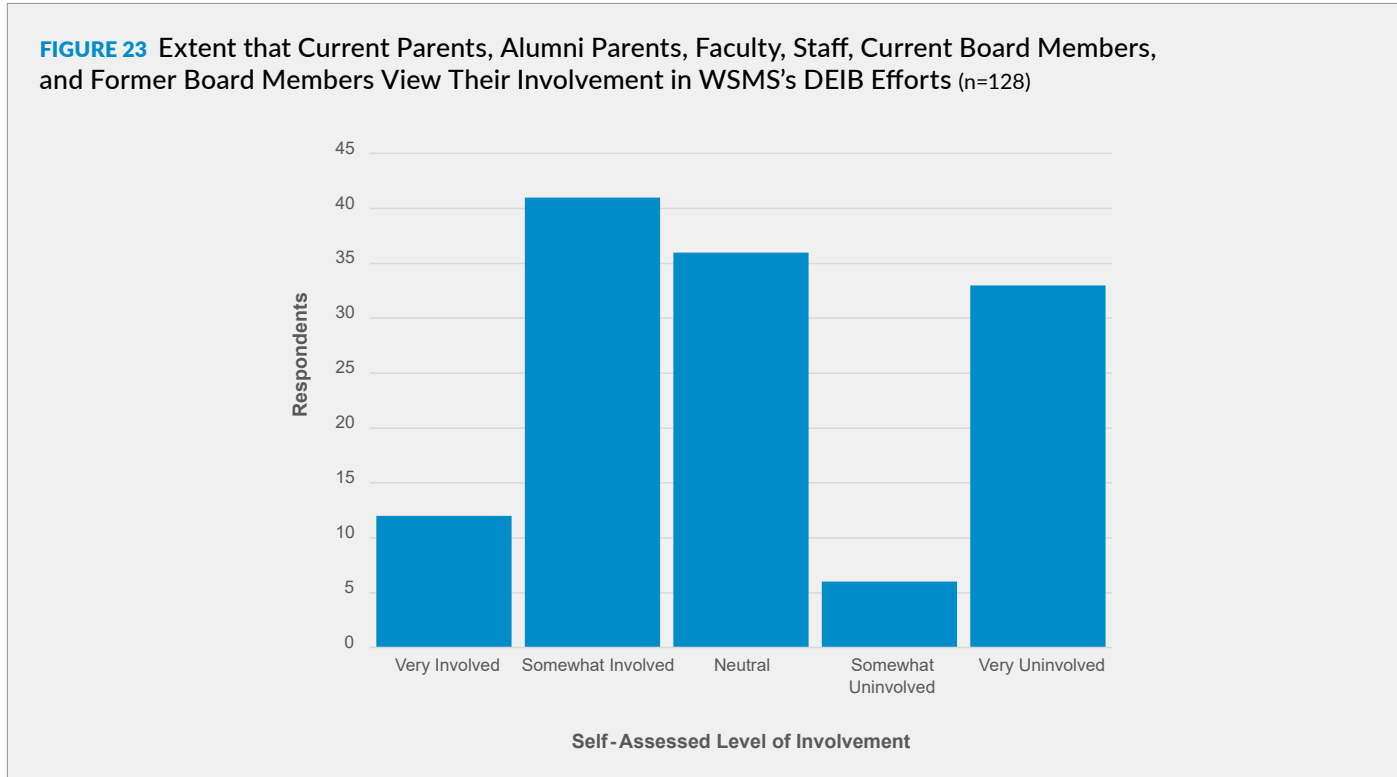
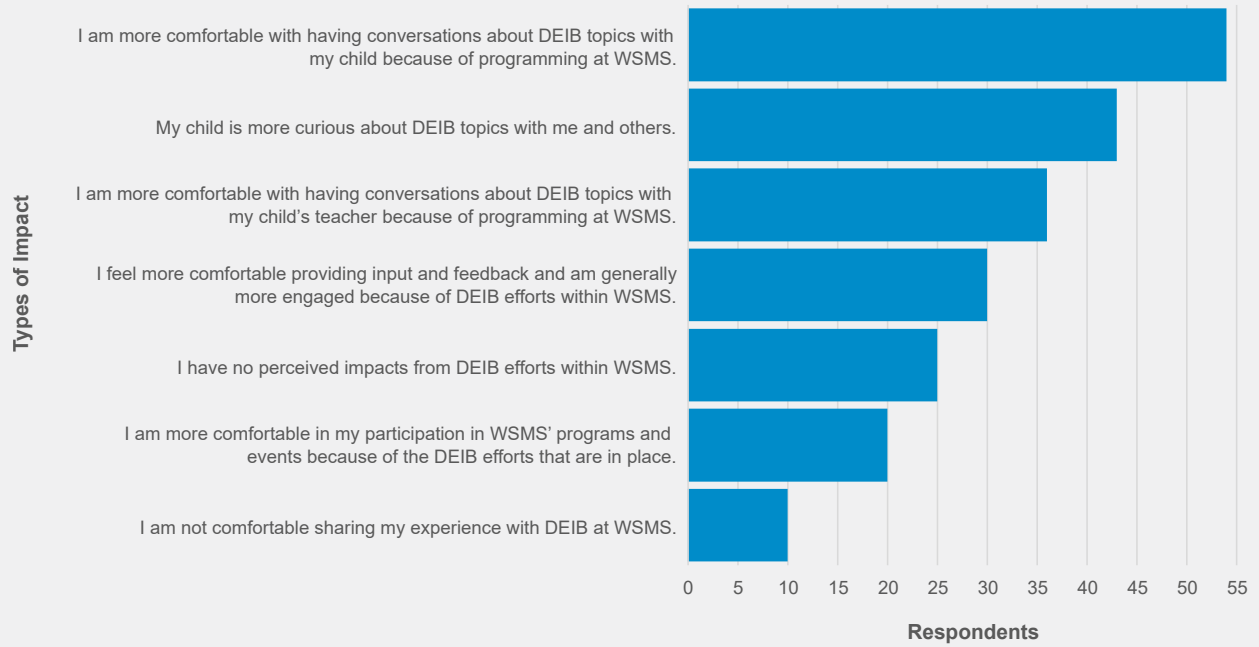


FIGURE 24 Current and Alumni Parents' Perception of How WSMS's DEIB Programs and Activities Impacted the School Community (n=108)



Strengthening the Home-School Connection

Throughout the data collection process, current families expressed that they want to engage in DEIB conversations with children more at home, but many are not sure how. One parent shared that her child has close friends of color in the classroom and reflected, “Martha said, ‘If your kids aren’t bringing [race] up, you should bring it up.’ But how do I do it?” The parent suggested receiving more tangible guidance on how to start these conversations with her child and the best approach. The parent understood their child was “reading or talking about emotions and what it feels like to belong” in the classroom and wanted to ensure that they are cohesively bridging the in-school learning experience at home in an age-appropriate way.

Other families shared that they would appreciate more proactive, regular communication. They voiced that they would like to receive a heads-up when sensitive topics were approached in class. During a focus group discussion, parents described non-DEIB, topical concepts that their children were partially introduced to in the classroom for which they had to fill in the gaps at home. There was a shared understanding — and acceptance — that young children will inevitably learn things outside of the home and surprise parents with their new knowledge, leaving parents to navigate new topics without an opportunity to prepare for the conversation. At the same time, parents felt like WSMS had an opportunity to inform families in advance of curriculum that might spark children to become curious about sensitive topics, including but not limited to DEIB work.

One parent recounted that there were some concepts presented in their child’s classroom about which they were less comfortable with the child learning without the school involving parents. The parent reported that their child learned about people dying in the context of the 1960s civil rights era. While this parent said that their child did not have a negative reaction to the lesson, the parent heard secondhand that other children did not react as positively to the information because the families did not have conversations ahead of time. This parent voiced that “a family approach” may help with lessons like these so that families can prepare their child with a foundation of knowledge, enabling a positive developmental experience processing new concepts.

All parents who spoke about the family newsletters expressed that they read them. Because the newsletters are sent every other week, there were delays between when the material was delivered to students and when families were reading about it in the newsletters. The newsletters provide a set of questions for families to discuss at home to bridge content delivery from the classroom to the kitchen table, which families appreciated. However, families expressed that those questions often did not touch on the values introduced to children in the classroom. Beyond continuing the conversation about the curriculum content, parents wanted to know what

types of concepts their children could have been introduced to through the lesson, such as slavery, violence, or death. Parents appreciated that their children were being introduced to historically marginalized or oppressed historical figures in the classroom and were largely comfortable with the manner in which the faculty introduced this information. They simply expressed that they wanted to be prepared for any topics that might arise at home as a result of the children being introduced to the concepts at school.

Parents also expressed that they would appreciate hearing from faculty members about how deeply certain concepts were discussed through lessons. One parent recounted an instance where her child came home from school sharing that they had learned about a historical figure in class. The child shared that “people were throwing things at him.” The parent recounted asking the child if they knew why people were throwing things at him. The child “kind of pieced it together, but not quite. And so [they] had to sit down” with their young child and ask them to explain what the child had learned about and how well they understood the situation. The parent said, “[My child] was confused and I had to explain” the context. The parent recounted this situation in good spirits and laughed as they shared that this conversation took them by surprise: “I wasn’t ready!” At the same time, they went on to share, “I know I can’t be prepared for every conversation in life... As much as we can have a heads-up to partner in these conversations is really helpful.”

Across the board, parents agreed that they would appreciate a more formalized system of receiving notice from faculty members before the school introduced topics that might open the door to more sensitive conversations at home.

Parents of Children of Color

The recently created Parents of Children of Color (POCOC) group received high praise from families. Parents appreciated that POCOC created a space where they could explore DEIB concepts in a space with invested parents. One parent shared that the choice to create this group was meaningful to them because they were able to engage in a fellowship and learning process for their own child without being excluded because of their skin color or identity. They felt that the framing of POCOC was highly needed and “important” for parents of children of color. A few parents noted that the challenges faced by parents of color are unique from parents who are white and suggested that there are opportunities for parents of color to develop fellowship related to their roles as parents as well.

While the Parents of Children of Color affinity group was created and received strong praise from attendees, some stakeholders wondered if there would have been more engagement had there also been an in-person option.

Families involved in DEIB activities shared their concern that only the same families showed up for sessions, such as for the family discussions with Martha Haakmat. Some families compared the involvement of families in DEIB as “preaching to the choir.”

Engagement Challenges and the Impacts of COVID-19

Many families addressed the impact which the COVID-19 pandemic had upon the ability for families to engage in their child’s in-school learning experience.

The most frequent example of a change that families encountered was their inability to participate in the Me Museum activity in person. Many parents did report that they were invited to Zoom into their child’s classroom to help their child engage with their Me Museum presentation. However, parents who had participated in the Me Museum in person prior to the pandemic reflected more fondly upon their experience. They appreciated how they had the opportunity to help their child tell their story.

Families described other in-person engagement opportunities that they hope will return such as WSMS’s fall festival for which the street closed and WSMS held a preschool fair. The event featured a table dedicated to international foods, and families brought foods from their respective cultural traditions. Information about the foods was posted beside the dishes so that other families could learn more about the culture. One parent reflected, “All that is lost right now; it is at a standstill” due to COVID. Although families acknowledged that the fall fair and similar events would return once it was safe, they shared that their family felt like something was missing in their experience without it.

A component of the WSMS DEIB curriculum is inviting families into the classroom to share their cultural traditions, especially around holidays. Since the start of the pandemic, families have been using Zoom to deliver presentations to classrooms. Families reflected that a “cultural component is a bit lost right now” without the in-person engagement. One parent noted, “When parents can have organic conversations with each other and with faculty, that we’re all working towards the same thing — raising our kids to be good people — [the intent] becomes so much clearer and emotions don’t fester. We see each other’s good intentions.”

A number of families expressed that despite the challenges that COVID-19 posed to a preschool environment, WSMS did a commendable job continuing to engage families. One parent shared that they felt aware of what was going on in the

school. “Especially in the difficult time of the pandemic, there was lots of input from the school.” The amount of effort that the school put into communicating and engaging with parents to bridge the gap between the in-school and at-home experience led that parent to feel as if the school’s efforts overcame the compromises made in response to the pandemic: “I didn’t feel there was a pandemic, in a way.”

Recommendations

Reengage in in-person activities when it is safe to do so.

Families are looking forward to strengthening ties among WSMS families through in-person events. By reinstating, enriching, and expanding upon in-person events that WSMS held in the past, families will have more opportunities to get involved in the WSMS community. This involvement will not only create space for DEIB activities, but will also naturally allow families with different identities to build ties. WSMS plants seeds of inclusive, diverse community-building in the classroom and can help these ideas blossom into action by providing space for WSMS families to naturally connect.

Create additional opportunities for families to partner with WSMS in developing children’s values

Families would like more updates about their children’s in-school experience. Some families expressed that this was exacerbated by the pandemic, as families could not enter the schools.

Families want to feel prepared for difficult conversations that might arise after their child learns something new in school. Through the data collection process, not one parent expressed that they did *not* want their child exposed to DEIB concepts in the classroom. WSMS families understand that there is a possibility that hard conversations will arise because of the enriching learning their children are receiving through DEIB activities and programming. Families want to be prepared.

WSMS may want to consider sending simple emails to parents to share a high-level plan for their curriculum for the next month, drawing attention to topics that might be accompanied by child curiosity and difficult conversations.

Example:

We will be reading a picture book about Martin Luther King, Jr. during Black History Month next month. The picture book and our discussion will focus on the life of Dr. King and his accomplishments. The book is *Book Title* if you would like to preview the content at home!

Help families expand upon lessons at home by providing them with a resource library

Many parents wanted recommendations for books to read at home to further their child's learning or interest on a certain topic. Parents specifically asked for a list of books that they could access online. WSMS's publishing a list of developmentally appropriate DEIB books on their website would serve to further assert WSMS as a leader in the field of DEIB education for early learners aged two to five.

WSMS faculty have already compiled lists of DEIB literature for the WSMS library. The lists include anti-bias literature for parents and families and age-appropriate literature for children, including books on types of families; identities; indigenous cultures; holidays; and books in foreign languages. Faculty have also sent themed book ideas to families on a monthly basis and provided suggestions for further developmentally appropriate content exploration. These themes for books include gender, disability, the stories of names, and socioeconomic class. As a leader in early childhood education, WSMS has an opportunity to publish to its website the information it has already cultivated to further identify itself as a thought leader in the field.





Conclusion

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) has been a key principle of West Side Montessori School since its founding, fifty-nine years ago. While DEIB has always been a core value of WSMS, the data analysis demonstrates that, over the last decade, DEIB has grown from an intentional effort to being embedded into the fabric of WSMS's culture. DEIB programming and activities are deeply ingrained into the school's mission, values, classroom environment, and organizational culture. The data also revealed its method has been effective, as families noted that WSMS's DEIB, which is integrated into Montessori learning, is values-driven and authentic.

WSMS has positioned itself as a leader in the educational landscape for its unique and holistic approach to DEIB. WSMS demonstrates a commitment to recruiting and hiring a diverse staff and to ensuring that all staff value DEIB in their professional efforts as well as their collegial relationships. WSMS offers professional development that has bolstered staff and faculty's willingness to discuss DEIB-related issues with their peers and with WSMS families.

A cornerstone of WSMS's holistic approach to DEIB is its admissions process. Admissions has played a vital role in fostering a more diverse student body representative of many cultures and has enhanced the socioeconomic diversity of the community with its robust financial aid program. WSMS also ensures that it supports families and children of color throughout their time at the school, from admissions through exmissions, by helping families of color navigate the admissions process to ongoing schools successfully.

What was echoed in surveys, interviews, and focus groups was that WSMS has been rooted in its DEIB work for a long time, and that DEIB is part of the school's identity. Rather

than the racial justice movement of 2020 serving as a catalyst for building DEIB efforts, as it did for many organizations, WSMS used the structures it already had in place to support its community through processing systemic racism and discussing difficult topics. More importantly, as a community, it was noted that families at WSMS feel they belong and are valued members of its community.

As WSMS's DEIB continues to evolve, one area of focus would be to deepen the home-school connection for families. Overall, parents expressed an interest in wanting to understand and learn more about the DEIB curriculum delivered to their children and want to be part of the learning process. This is especially important for families of young children who may not be able to observe the impact of the DEIB curriculum. Updating families about upcoming and recently delivered curricula will help parents stay abreast of the values and concepts their children are learning and enable families to support their development at home. Another way to deepen the home-school connection would be to provide families with a variety of ways to access information about how to incorporate DEIB into their daily lives.

WSMS can expand its DEIB programming to include identities, such as gender identity and able-bodiedness, in a developmentally appropriate manner. And, WSMS can leverage the same intentional approach that it has harnessed with its DEIB programming and activities to introduce other values-based concepts into the curriculum, such as environmentalism. Ultimately, WSMS offers a comprehensive DEIB approach that differentiates it as a leader in the field, and its commitment to growth will continue it on its trajectory of excellence.

About Luminary Evaluation Group

Luminary Evaluation Group is a program evaluation firm that helps nonprofits and funders identify what is working, what is not working, and what options exist to enhance programming. At the core of our collaborative process is deep contextual exploration, anchored by qualitative data collection and analysis. We listen, observe, and build reciprocal relationships with our clients, and facilitate sharing and exploration between stakeholders. Our deep contextual knowledge of nonprofit programs, challenges, and goals allows us to work with stakeholders to identify useful questions for the base of the evaluation protocol, and to understand the issues and contexts of a given evaluation project. This enables us to develop an appropriate evaluation plan to reflect the reality of a program, capture existing knowledge, and produce essential new insights. Our clients report being able to clearly see actionable next steps from evaluation findings.

SERVICES

- **Program Evaluation**
We help nonprofits assess their impact and make data-driven decisions based on findings and recommendations.
- **Evaluation Capacity Building**
Organizations often conduct data collection and assessment with their own staff. We help them build evaluation plans and ongoing practices that they can implement.
- **Logic Models**
A solid logic model is the foundation impact. We help organizations build and refine logic models.
- **Model Capture**
Good programs need good materials. We help organizations codify and articulate their program models by designing user-friendly and attractive written manuals and guides.
- **Surveys, Interviews, and Focus Groups**
As part of Luminary's commitment to equity and culturally responsive practices, surveys are available in all languages. We also offer focus groups and qualitative interview services in both English and Spanish.

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Alison LaRocca **President & CEO**

Alison has spent her career working at the intersection of nonprofit research, senior level advisement, and strategy. Alison is the Managing Director of [Luminary Evaluation Group](#). Luminary's mission is to improve the lives of children and families by conducting high-quality, participatory research for funders and nonprofit organizations of every size, capacity, and budget who are interested in understanding, articulating, and growing their impact. In this role, Alison brings her particular expertise in participatory evaluation and human centered design, instrument development, data collection, and quantitative and qualitative data analysis. As an evaluator, Alison helps clients communicate research effectively to key stakeholders and other broad audiences. Specifically, she supports organization leaders as they work to use data effectively, incorporate evidence-based practices into programs and policies, assess effectiveness, and improve outcomes. Alison is a graduate of Williams College and holds a Master's in Elementary Education from Merrimack College.

Alexandra Kirade **Senior Consultant**

Alexandra Kirade is a Senior Consultant at Luminary. She delivers high-quality, actionable strategy and support to organizations through a social justice lens and feminist approach. Alexandra is adept at working across organizations and communities to create shared vision and drive results. Assuming a leadership role in community mental health at the height of Manchester, NH's opioid crisis, Alexandra contributed to several leading-edge, federally funded initiatives. Alexandra graduated *magna cum laude* from Stonehill College with Bachelors of Arts degrees in Psychology and Gender & Sexuality Studies. She holds a Master of Public Administration and a Master of Arts in Community Development Policy & Practice from the University of New Hampshire. She also holds a Graduate Certificate in Diversity, Social Justice, and Inclusion from the University of Colorado—Colorado Springs. Alexandra's research has explored how policy, power, and privilege intersect to contribute to disparities in health and well-being, education, and employment.

LaToshia DeVose **Senior Consultant**

LaToshia has 11 years of experience working in various capacities on initiatives geared toward increasing child care program capacity. She is a firm believer that every business operator has the ability to manage an effective business and that every child deserves a quality education. Previously, she served as the ECE Business Development Director with Public Health Management Corporation in Philadelphia. In that role, LaToshia provided leadership and coordination on the

Fund for Quality, a high quality child care facility expansion program. During her tenure on that project, over 2,500 new child care seats were created to serve children from low-income families. LaToshia also oversaw the implementation of a local child care facility's improvement grant fund for several years in addition to managing a replication organizational TA/facility program in Washington, D.C. Through this work, tens of thousands of child care seats were improved and/or sustained.

Jennifer Vail

Project Associate

Jennifer Vail is a Project Associate at Luminary. With 25 years of professional experience in project management, executive support, and customer engagement, Jennifer provides Luminary with essential operations and project support. Prior to joining the Luminary team, Jennifer served as a Systems Administrator for Tri-Supreme Optical, a wholesale manufacturing company. Her responsibilities included assisting the General Manager with complex organizational planning, maintaining the laboratory operating system, and managing the human resource and benefit responsibilities for a team of over 100 employees. For the preceding 25 years, Jennifer was an Account Manager for both ABB Optical and Essilor of America, where she managed multi-million dollar territories serving the Metro NY optical community. Her success in Account Management was fueled by her desire to improve the lives of optical patients while acting as a valued advisor for the business owners throughout her territories. Her skillset and passion brought her to her current position with Civitas Strategies where she is fulfilling her goal of serving mission-driven organizations as a valued member of the team. Jennifer holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with a concentration in photography from Arizona State University. She is also a Board Certified Optician with the American Board of Opticianry.

Gary Romano

Founder

With more than 20 years of management and consulting experience, Gary supports the design and direction of all our evaluations. He is an award-winning strategist, author, and advisor for nonprofit leaders and entrepreneurs whose work has helped grow national and regional organizations, move startups to stable state, and bring new ideas to market. He is the published author of three books, *Small But Mighty*, which is helping entrepreneurs to launch and grow nonprofit consultancies, *Lean Recruitment*, an innovative system to cost-effectively recruit talent, and *Finding Your North Star™*, in which he shares his strategic planning system, built upon 30 years of experience facilitating strategy development with organizations nationwide. Gary is a Senior Certified Professional with the Society for Human Resources Managers. He has a Master's in Urban Affairs and Planning from Virginia Tech, and a Bachelor's in Political Science from Stony Brook University.