

DEIB: LUMINARY REPORT

In the fall of 2021, WSMS engaged the Luminary Evaluation Group (Luminary) to conduct an independent evaluation of the school's diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) activities in order to assess their execution, engagement and effectiveness. **The purpose of the evaluation was to highlight examples of how these programs affect the WSMS community, and to identify additional opportunities that may be available for further growth.**

The evaluation spanned seven months, from November 2021 to May 2022, and utilized four types of data:

- Artifacts including documents, reports, tools, photos, meeting minutes, workshop slide decks, resource materials, demographic information, listserv email exchanges, and curriculum samples generated by the WSMS team
- 17 Qualitative Interviews with WSMS stakeholders* to capture stories and experiences of WSMS stakeholders
- 4 Focus Groups with parents and caregivers of WSMS students, WSMS teachers, WSMS administrative (non-teaching) staff, and the WSMS Board Directors
- Surveys completed by 128 stakeholders* between March 28 and May 2, 2022.

*WSMS stakeholders include parents/families of students (current and alumni), faculty and staff, and members of the Board of Directors (current and former)

The evaluation focused on the following:

- The key elements of WSMS DEIB activities
- Programmatic Impact: In-School Experience
- Programmatic Impact: Family Engagement

Luminary concluded that, “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 that WSMS’s method has been effective, as families noted that WSMS’s DEIB, which is integrated into Montessori learning, is values-driven and authentic.”

The following is a brief summary of the three observations and recommendations. The full report is available on our website at About → At a Glance → Mission.

OBSERVATION 1:

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

Children and Families:

Over many years, WSMS has seamlessly woven DEIB into



its culture and curriculum. WSMS’s approach to celebrating each child’s individuality and meeting children where they are, along with lessons rooted in kindness and belonging, has created an environment for authentic and effective DEIB programming and activities in the classroom. The following are some examples of how DEIB has been incorporated into the school and classrooms:

Throughout The School

- Displayed art and signs
- Broad variety of books available
- Materials, like dolls of varying skin colors
- The lunch menu, which incorporates international dishes into its offerings

In The Classrooms

- Changemakers/Peacemakers Study
- Classroom Peace Contract
- Advocacy
- Skin and Hair Color Art Project
- Equity vs. Equality Lesson
- Art projects and parent presentations related to celebrating holidays around the world

It was noted that the conversations faculty are having with children about identities that make us different are taught to both normalize and to celebrate differences. More than two-thirds of parents surveyed felt that the behaviors and practices of their children have been positively impacted by DEIB activities. Additionally, parents also expressed that they have observed their children bring home the values they are taught in the classroom.

Faculty and Staff:

WSMS’s commitment and investment in professional development supports teacher growth.

DEIB has been embedded into WSMS’s organizational culture through its unique and holistic approach. WSMS is committed to recruiting and hiring a diverse staff and ensuring that

all staff value DEIB in their professional efforts as well as their collegial relationships. WSMS offers multiple tools for professional development that have bolstered staff and faculty willingness to discuss DEIB-related issues with their peers and with WSMS families. It was noted that faculty and staff believe children's learning and growth have been positively impacted by DEIB activities.

Opportunities:

- Bridge adult learning to provide more tools through professional development for teachers to use in sensitive conversations with children.
- Leverage DEIB approach to enrich values-based curriculum, such as teaching about environmentalism.
- Capitalize on enrichment opportunities to further embed DEIB, such as having music and movement specialists incorporate music and dance from other cultures into their teaching.

OBSERVATION 2:

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

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.

In 2021-2022, 59% of children identify as students of color with 44% being multilingual. For the 2022-2023 school year, admitted families are from 21 different zip codes with 20% of those families receiving financial aid. Additionally, efforts are made during class placement to ensure that children are placed in classrooms where there are other students and faculty who share similar identities or backgrounds. In the 2021-2022 school year, almost 70% of WSMS faculty identify as people of color, providing both fellowship and role modeling for children in the classroom.

The Luminary Report noted that WSMS is committed to supporting families and children of color throughout their time at the school, from admissions through exmissions, by helping families of color successfully navigate the admissions process to ongoing schools.

What was echoed in surveys, interviews, and focus groups was that WSMS has been rooted in its DEIB work for a long time. Families stated that they chose WSMS over other schools because of its commitment to DEIB. More importantly, as a community, it was noted that families at WSMS feel they belong and are valued members of its community.

Opportunities:

- Broaden the DEIB lens to include other less-represented identities, by including gender identity and able-bodiedness materials in a developmentally appropriate manner.
- Consider ways to enhance dialogue focused on socio-economic diversity.

- Continue to develop resources to help prepare families and children of color to transition out of WSMS to their next school.

OBSERVATION 3:

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

A key takeaway from the Luminary surveys, interviews and focus groups is that the WSMS DEIB programs and activities have had a positive far-reaching impact on the community. Luminary highlighted the need for more proactive communication with parents, particularly with regard to upcoming classroom topics (not limited to DEIB) so that they can be better prepared for their children's questions and responses. Overall, current parents expressed an interest in wanting to understand and learn more about the DEIB curriculum delivered to their children, and they want to be part of the learning process. Updating families about upcoming and recently delivered curricula will help parents stay abreast of the values and concepts their children are learning and will enable families to support their development at home. This has been especially critical since parents have not been able to go into the classrooms or attend in-person school events due to Covid-19 for the last few years. Another way to deepen the home-school connection would be to provide families with access to information about how to incorporate DEIB into their daily lives.

Opportunities:

- Re-engage in in-person activities when it is safe to do so.
- Create additional opportunities for families to partner with WSMS in developing children's values, such as sharing a curriculum ahead of time.

WSMS engaged Luminary to do a review of our DEIB initiatives not only to find the areas where we are excelling, but to find areas and opportunities for growth. We look forward to sharing with the community the enhancements we will be making as a result of the recommendations made by Luminary.



MARLENE BARRON



The West Side Montessori School community mourns the passing of former Head of School, Marlene Barron, on June 1, 2022.

Marlene served in many different roles as a mentor providing a guiding light both professionally and personally to many people. She was a visionary, whose impact was far-reaching and effects are still felt at WSMS today.

Marlene was Head of School from 1979 until 2007, and oversaw an amazing array of accomplishments at WSMS, from major facilities updates in the 309 building, to leading two Montessori teacher education programs at NYU and CHAMP, which later became WSMS-TEP. Marlene embraced and celebrated the diversity of people. She coined the term “multi-multi,” insisting that her school and community embody a curriculum and environment that was multicultural, multi-economic, multi-racial, multi-sensorial ... multi-everything. With anything Marlene created, everyone was welcome and everyone belonged.

Marlene began her Montessori career by starting a school for her daughter in Staten Island, and grew to become an international icon through her work at WSMS and WSMS-TEP. She served as president of the American Montessori Society (AMS) and on the board of MACTE, the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education. After she “retired” from WSMS, she traveled the globe as a Montessori consultant focused on training teachers; she lived for over a decade running a Montessori teacher training program in Beijing.

Marlene’s legacy will live on through the teachers she mentored and the countless children they guide through childhood.

She is survived by her three children, Leslie Barron, Jeffrey Barron and Joshua Fetzer, seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

MARLENE BARRON FUND

In celebration of her remarkable life, and her commitment to West Side Montessori School, the WSMS Board has established a fund for children in her name.



Please consider making a contribution in honor of Marlene, and in support of making a great beginning available to many more children at WSMS.

FAREWELL, LOREN!



Loren DeNicola, the Associate Head of School for Teaching and Learning, has moved on to a new and exciting opportunity as Head of the Montessori Children’s House at the Whitby School in Greenwich, CT. Loren joined the WSMS teaching staff in 2007. She later served in administrative capacities in fundraising and

admissions at WSMS, was the Director of WSMS-TEP, and left to be the Director of the Brownstone School. In January 2017 she came back to WSMS as the Associate Head of School for Teaching and Learning, where we have benefited from her diverse array of talents and her devotion to the school. We will definitely miss her kindness and support, as well her professional impact, and we are grateful for all she has done for WSMS over her long connection to the school.

We wish Loren the best on her future endeavors!

WELCOME, KATHLEEN!



We are excited to announce Kathleen Cook as our new Associate Head of School for Teaching and Learning. Kathleen has an impressive background with a widerange of experience, her most recent as a Senior Vice President of Early Childhood Programs/ Director of Nursery School Oversight at the 92nd Street

Y. Prior to that Kathleen was the Director of the First Presbyterian Nursery School and had roles in admissions at Trevor Day, Bank Street, and Packer Collegiate. She began her teaching career in the public and private school early childhood and elementary. Kathleen is committed to meeting the needs of the whole child—emotional, intellectual, physical and social—and to including parents, teachers, and administrators as active participants and collaborators in a child’s growth and education.

Kathleen started in August and quickly felt at home. We are looking forward to all her fresh ideas!