



Little Red School House & Elisabeth Irwin High School

LREI Equity and Community Report

November, 2024

Introduction: Beginning in 2020, and in each year since, LREI leadership has shared a report on the goals, programs, and initiatives of the school's Equity and Community office. This custom was established in a time of great upheaval: in the summer of 2020 we lived through the uncertain early months of the Covid-19 pandemic and we witnessed the crescendo of the largest movement for racial justice in our country's history. Although this report was conceived in that 2020 context, the goals, programs, and initiatives of the Equity and Community office continue to be broadly relevant: we aim to strengthen equitable and inclusive practices, procedures, and systems across the school, and to meet the needs of all LREI community members. In short, we work to cultivate a school environment in which all community members are seen, heard, protected, and treated fairly. We know that it is in such an environment that we are most likely to fulfill the requirements of our progressive mission and of our school's historic commitment to justice; we know that in such an environment all young people will develop the skills necessary to make sense of a complicated, bewildering, and frightening world; we know that the cultivation of such an environment is a necessary precondition for successful teaching and learning.

How do we work toward these objectives? We do so by centering the needs of our students and by grounding our work in our shared values and principles. We remain steadfast in our belief that our school, by keeping our progressive program at the center, can continue to become a place where all students can feel supported, find a genuine sense of belonging, and experience success in the classroom. Our student programming and much of our faculty professional development is designed and led by skilled and experienced members of the Equity and Community team, which includes high school history teacher Charlene Cruz-Cerdas, 8th-grade humanities teacher Sara Momii Roberts, and kindergarten teacher Tori Murphy. Although the Equity and Community Office has a central role to play in this work, to be successful the work must belong to – and be led by – all of us. What follows is a non-exhaustive look at the ongoing Equity and Community work at LREI, divided into three areas:

- Strengthening our culturally responsive program;
- Standardizing equitable practices;
- Mechanisms of institutional accountability.

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Please take some time to learn about the Equity and Community work taking place at LREI, and please don't hesitate to be in touch with the Director of Equity and Community, Kalil Oldham, with any questions about this work. As in all things, we are a school committed to growth and learning through ongoing community conversation. Please find links to previous years' reports and plans at the end of this document.

Strengthening our culturally responsive program: At LREI we aim to create learning experiences that allow for the affirmation, celebration, and exploration of the many dimensions of students' identities. In developmentally appropriate ways, LREI teachers engage students with stories, discussions, research projects, and academic analyses aimed to deepen their understanding of all aspects of their identities, and the identities of others. This includes taking seriously the dynamics of power, privilege, marginalization, and oppression, which exist today in our society, and which have existed historically. An important aspect of this culturally responsive program is to strengthen students' capacity for engaging in dialogue, discourse, and disagreement across lines of difference, while honoring throughout the essential human dignity of all people. Below are three examples that illustrate our ongoing work in this area.

- **Dialogue and Discourse:** Throughout the 2023-2024 school year LREI students, teachers, staff members, and parents all participated in facilitated conversations about dignity affirming practices with Jason Craige Harris. Older students and high school teachers learned about deliberative dialogue as a tool when discussing contentious political issues with Elisabeth Becker. A sizable cohort of teachers participated in a multi-day workshop on dialogic lesson planning with Essential Partners. And, this theme has continued in the fall of this year with an intensive day of learning for students, teachers, and parents on the topic of civil discourse, with multiple guest speakers, field work excursions, and classroom discussions (including a student-led "Democracy Day" in the high school) in the lead-up to the 2024 election. Each of these practices – affirming dignity, deliberative dialogue, dialogic lesson planning, and civil discourse – is focused on building our capacity, as students, faculty, and staff, to engage across lines of difference with empathy and honesty, to center the dignity and humanity of all community members in ways that align with our mission and history as a leading progressive school.



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- **Identity and anti-bias programs for students and teachers.** Over the past several years we have continued to strengthen our program in several areas related to students' identities. The Equity and Community Facilitator in each division provides monthly resources for all teachers with the goal of supporting a culturally responsive curriculum. Additionally, the academic study of identity in middle and high school grew more robust with new lessons being added to our high school Life Lab and middle school Identity Foundations curricula, and through an in-depth review of our lower school social studies curriculum. Moreover, LREI faculty and staff continue to participate in professional development with a focus on building knowledge and practices necessary to mitigate and respond to instances of identity based bias when they occur. For example, in the 2023-2024 school year faculty and staff members participated in several training sessions to learn about antisemitism in schools; in early 2025 our school will engage in a partnership with the Interfaith Center of New York to learn about how we all – students, teachers, staff, and parents – can work together more effectively as a religiously diverse community; and, plans are developing to continue our learning about questions of gender and gender identity in the wake of a presidential election season that featured open appeals to patriarchy. These sessions will be provided for students, teachers, staff, and parents.
- **Parent Identity Groups.** The culturally responsive program at LREI includes our parent community as well. In the past year, members of the LREI Parents Association have created three new identity groups: a PA Learning Differences affinity group; a PA Jewish affinity group; and a PA Middle East and Muslim heritage group. Additionally, the fall of 2024 saw the revival of the longstanding PA Gender/Sexuality Alliance (GSA). These four joined an already-robust array of parent groups in meeting regularly and in organizing school wide community conversations on topics that arise in their affinity conversations. We look forward to continuing to work with each group and to make space for critical conversations about how we can partner to support LREI students in all of their identities. Please see the family handbook for descriptions of these parent groups, and please stay tuned for our next parent-led community conversation, coming before the end of the calendar year.



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Standardization of equitable practices: At LREI we know that our Equity and Community work must be embedded within the systems and structures of the school for it to sustain and endure. We are therefore focused on creating, modifying, and buttressing the systems and structures necessary to support our diverse community, and to ensure that all students are seen, heard, protected, and treated fairly. Here are three examples that illustrate this work:

- **Curriculum Assessment.** The LREI Equity and Community curriculum assessment process formally began in the fall of 2022. In the 2022-2023 school year every member of the LREI faculty completed the process, and in the 2023-2024 school year the process focused on lower school teachers. Our curriculum assessment continues in the current school year, with focus shifting to the high school. The purpose of the curriculum assessment process is to create an ongoing process of reflection and growth for LREI teachers to address three areas of curriculum through an equity and inclusion lens. Our assessment process serves to highlight examples of best practices in this area and to provide support for all teachers in continuing to develop our ability to meet the needs of all students. The three areas of assessment are: classroom environment, instructional practices, and class materials. The initial curriculum assessment is followed by small group conversations, faculty meeting discussions, and the gathering of student feedback.
- **Anti-Discrimination Policy and Reporting Protocol.** LREI is committed to mitigating and responding to instances of identity-based bias and discrimination within the school. The LREI anti-discrimination policy and reporting protocol is one formal process we use to address these incidents. Originally implemented several years ago, the policy is used regularly by community members; it is subject to regular revision by the board's Committee on Diversity and Community; and the outcomes from its use is shared with LREI community members from all constituencies during twice yearly meetings of the Community Committee. The LREI Anti-Discrimination policy can be found on the website and in the Student, Faculty, Staff, and Family Handbooks.
- **Faculty and Staff Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention.** We are committed to hiring and retaining faculty and staff whose diversity reflects the multiplicity of identities present in our school and in New York City as a whole. Over the past two years we have begun to implement more proactive approaches to our hiring and retention practices, and there

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continues to be work to do in this area. In addition, we continue to shore up and standardize our anti-bias hiring practices, including the strengthening of our anti-bias practices for each stage of the hiring process. This standardization includes regular and required anti-bias training for hiring teams, a consistent anti-bias hiring process, and data collection to ensure a diversity of perspectives on hiring committees.

Institutional accountability: All LREI constituencies are engaged in the work of developing equitable practices and strengthening community bonds, and we believe that doing so effectively requires us to take steps toward institutional accountability. This includes building capacity at all levels, including at the leadership level, as well as providing community members with regular opportunities to offer feedback. Below are two examples of institutional accountability at work at LREI:

- **NAIS AIM Climate Survey.** In February of 2024 all LREI constituents were asked to complete a 15-minute climate questionnaire called the AIM Climate Survey. Created by the National Association of Independent Schools to measure the effectiveness of inclusivity efforts at member institutions, AIM provides detailed data on the experience of students, teachers, staff members, administrators, board members, and parents. Our participation rates for the AIM survey were quite high, and the data we received has informed our conversations and planning in the spring and summer of 2024. We will continue to consult the results of this survey as we develop our programming for the 2024-2025 school year, and students, teachers, and parents can all expect to be engaged in substantive conversations about the patterns and trends that the survey revealed. We will continue, in a transparent way, to acknowledge the many areas in which this survey showed LREI as a healthy community, as well as to address the areas of concern that emerged. For example, our work (described above) in early 2025 with the Interfaith Center of New York was prompted by feedback received from the AIM survey.
- **Building Capacity for School Leaders.** The annual 2023-2024 board of trustees retreat was led by Martha Haakmat of Haakmat Consulting. Martha is an experienced guide for independent school board members looking to assess the board's processes and procedures through an equity and inclusion lens. Professional learning opportunities for the Leadership Team will continue in the current school year.

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In this work we recognize many lines of connection between the school's history, mission, philosophy, and values and the practices, programs, and principles of the Equity and Community office. Whether you are a student, teacher, member of the staff, or parent, please don't hesitate to join the conversation about how we can continue to build a school that meets the needs of everyone.

[Link to the 2023 LREI E&C Report](#)

[Link to the 2022 LREI DEI Plan](#)

[Link to the 2021 LREI DEI Plan](#)

[Link to a Letter from LREI Director Phil Kassen, July, 2020](#)