



Little Red School House & Elisabeth Irwin High School

LREI Equity and Community Report

Fall, 2025

We began the practice of sharing regular updates on our equity and community work in the summer of 2020: a time of great disruption, which also felt like a time of great possibility. Systems of power that had long been invisible to many were made visible to all, and the arc of the moral universe seemed to be bending toward justice. Like many institutions, at LREI we made explicit commitments: to curriculum, to professional learning, to hiring, to culture. Each of these was in line with our mission, our history, and our school's underlying philosophy. Those were the heady and halcyon days of "DEI"; to express public support for "diversity, equity, and inclusion" in independent schools was uncontroversial. And, not beholden to the passing fads of the moment, LREI was well-positioned to lead into a just future. The times have changed, but we haven't wavered from our mission, our philosophy, and our historic commitment to justice.

At LREI, our Equity and Community work was never subject to passing fads. Rather, we innovate with intention; we apply timeless principles — of education through experience — to the swiftly changing world our students are coming to know. Our aim is to prepare students to face an uncertain future, which means developing knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that will be of service in any future social, political, and cultural milieu. When the world feels wobbly, unstable, and precarious, LREI students learn to build a sturdy and reliable foundation. And our world wobbles: an increasingly unsettling, bewildering, and scary political and geopolitical context; families and educators still recalibrating after the one-two punch of the Covid-19 pandemic and the sudden ubiquity of generative AI and its large language models; an unprecedented level of scrutiny and pressure on schools and teachers; and a churning debate over the very curriculum, policy, and community practices that we have long used to reinforce students' sense of belonging.

What follows is a summary of our programs, policies, and practices designed to create a more equitable and inclusive environment for teaching and learning. These efforts — led by the E&C team and supported through the active partnership of all members of our professional community — have been shown to improve the general well being and academic success of our

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students. This report includes examples of our Equity and Community work, drawn from three areas of focus:

1. Our Culturally Responsive Program
2. Equitable Institutional Practices
3. Ongoing Professional Learning

1) Our Culturally Responsive Program

Progressive Practice and Culturally Responsive Teaching: LREI's historic practice of progressive education works from the theory that children learn through experience in order to develop the skills and agency necessary to move toward independence. When practiced with a culturally responsive lens, which recognizes and accounts for the reality that students' and teachers' identities have an impact on the experience of teaching and learning, these pedagogical practices ensure that we take seriously the many dimensions of identity that students carry with them into the school buildings, and the ways those identities intersect with and impact their ability to access learning to their fullest potential.

Curriculum assessment: LREI teachers engage in an ongoing process of curriculum self-assessment in three crucial areas of teaching: classroom environment; instructional practices; and materials and content. A working group of teachers from all LREI divisions has articulated a set of “best practices” in each of these areas, and each year a different group of LREI teachers assess their own practice through several modes: self-assessment; small group discussion; work with the Equity and Community team; and gathering student feedback. The result of this annual process is to return continually to the central questions of teaching, with an emphasis on designing equitable and inclusive learning experiences. In the 2025-2026 school year, for the first time since 2023, the middle school faculty will engage in this multi-stage process.

Identity Curriculum: Students at LREI learn about the diversity of social identities across the curriculum and in a variety of ways. Throughout the lower school social studies arc, LREI teachers create opportunities to explore, share, and celebrate the many dimensions of all

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students' identities. In middle school students engage with questions of identity and power in their classes, in the Choices curriculum, and in many other curricular and co-curricular spaces. High school students are similarly exposed to a diversity of identities through their course material, and there are explicit lessons on identity, power, in the 9th and 10th grade Life Lab classes. These components of our program have become more aligned and more purposeful in recent years, and we continue to refine and to sharpen them.

Affinity Groups: In addition to the above programs, students of all ages have the opportunity to gather in affinity and ally groups. These groups support students' positive identity development; they help to build knowledge and understanding of the diversity in our school; they lead to a strengthening of community connections within the school; and they foster a sense of belonging for all students. LREI students consistently report that their affinity and ally groups provide an essential space for connection with peers and teachers, and that these spaces stand out as critical components of their school experience. Moreover, over many decades educational researchers have found that students, especially those whose identities have been targeted, excluded, or otherwise marginalized historically, benefit in tangible ways from their participation in affinity groups: they experience fewer mental health struggles and greater academic success, and overall they report a stronger sense of belonging within the school community.

Our affinity and ally group programs vary by age group and from year to year, based on students' and families' expressed interests and needs. Lower school students meet periodically in a wide range of groups to learn about and discuss what it means to be in community. Middle school affinity groups meet every other week and are offered in a range of identity-based areas, depending on students' stated interests and needs each year. High school groups, which meet as part of the x-block program, are led by students and change from year to year based on student interest.

2) Equitable Institutional Practices

Addressing bias and discrimination: Over the past 12 months we have continued to revise and refine the LREI Anti-Discrimination Policy and Bias Incident Report Protocol. After extensive

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discussion with school leadership, the Board of Trustees' Committee on Diversity and Community, and our external anti-discrimination investigator, and with the approval of LREI's Board of Trustees, we have expanded the options for responding to incidents of discrimination to include a pathway toward restorative conversations. Going forward, we will continue to examine and expand our anti-bias practices so that we can address patterns of bias that may not be reported or identified as specific incidents. This work is a priority of the administrative leadership team and is ongoing.

Recruitment, hiring, retention: At LREI we recognize that a professional community that is diverse across all dimensions of identity is best suited to meet the needs of a diverse population of students and families. We also recognize that there is a lack of racial diversity with the educational profession as a whole, and in New York City independent schools specifically. To help us address this concern, every person serving on a hiring committee at LREI receives explicit anti-bias training, and LREI hiring committees employ best anti-bias practices at all stages of the hiring process to minimize the effects of identity-based bias. We continue to update these practices, and to seek out more proactive approaches to recruiting, hiring, and retaining top-notch progressive educators, allowing us to continue a long tradition of professional excellence in our school.

3) Ongoing Professional Learning

The professional community: A significant focus over the past 12 months has been the development and strengthening of our approach to discourse and dialogue. Through special workshops, guest speakers, and in-house professional development, faculty in all three divisions at LREI have been engaged in ongoing practice-based work on the question of what it means to foster active discourse and dialogue in the classroom. Because this question is central to our mission as a progressive school, our focus in this area has felt like a natural complement to teachers' existing practice and knowledge base.

In connection with our work on discourse and dialogue, in early 2025 the E&C team hosted a series of conversations with a diverse group of faith leaders from around New York City, moderated by the Interfaith Center of New York (ICNY). These conversations – with sessions for

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students, parents, and teachers – offered a model of constructive discourse and provided a powerful tool for strengthening our culturally responsive practice. In the coming year, the E&C team will look for ways to apply a culturally responsive lens to the way we think about learning differences and learning support at LREI, and to the strong and enduring systems of learning support that are already in place. In so doing we will continue to refine and sharpen the tools of culturally responsive teaching, making use of all available professional development tools.

The Board of Trustees: The Equity and Community team will also support LREI's Board of Trustees as they embark on a process of review and possible revision of the school's Diversity Statement, last approved by the Board in 2012. This critical deliberative process will allow us to more precisely articulate our values and philosophy, in alignment with our mission and history.

Parents and caregivers: As we do each year, the LREI Equity and Community team will continue to work with parents and caregivers to support the school's progressive program and to work toward creating an environment where all students have the opportunity to thrive. This work includes supporting the many affinity and identity groups that have formed within the parent and caregiver community, including the regular cross-group and all-school conversations those groups have organized and facilitated. In addition, we will continue our practice of inviting outside experts and offer parent education workshops with the goal of cultivating community conversations on topics related to Equity and Community.

As an authentically progressive school community with a rich history, unparalleled faculty and staff, and a deep commitment to our mission and values, we are confident that LREI is well-positioned to meet the challenges of the current moment in education. As the leader of our Equity and Community team, I cherish the collaboration, partnership, and support from all community members, and I sincerely hope that you will join the conversation about how we can continue to strengthen our school community.

[2024 LREI E&C Report](#)
[2021 LREI DEI Plan](#)

[2023 LREI E&C Report](#)
[Letter from LREI Director Phil Kassen, July, 2020](#)

[2022 LREI DEI Plan](#)

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