

Places of Alignment: Episcopal Identity and Inclusion



The National Association of Episcopal Schools is proud to provide this update of the work to date that has taken place through the generous support of the Edward E. Ford Foundation's funding of our grant, "Places of Alignment: Episcopal Identity and Inclusion."

The work began at Biennial Conference 2018 in Atlanta with a group of Diversity Practitioners and Chaplains gathering together for a full day workshop. This workshop was planned and facilitated by Ms. Sandi Hannibal, who NAES hired to provide consulting for the project. Sandi Hannibal is uniquely qualified to lead this project, having served as both chapel coordinator as well as director of diversity at the Norwood School (MD) for many years. Her current work at the Bishop Walker School for Boys in Washington DC allows her to keep in direct, ongoing touch

with the needs of Episcopal schools

to further the work of justice and equity. Representatives from 14 schools across the country, serving students from Pre-K through high school came together to explore the intersection of Episcopal Identity and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as well as the working relationship between the Chaplain and Diversity Practitioner. For many, this was a new concept that opened up enormous possibilities. The day included a presentation from Ms. Caroline Blackwell, NAIS Vice President for Equity and Justice. Key take-aways from this time together included the affirmation that participants craved connections with one another—especially including the opportunity for face-to-face gatherings—as well as peer-to-peer resource and knowledge sharing. This cohort of individuals, eager to move the work forward, committed to serving as the planning committee for our March 2020 conference.

At the same time as this initial meeting, Biennial Conference 2018 also had a robust track addressing

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for Episcopal Schools.

We had unprecedented attendance from Diversity Practitioners at this Biennial and participants serving in all roles at our member schools benefited immensely from the

enhanced programming. This has laid a solid foundation for threading Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives into the broader work of the Association, and certainly contributed to the popularity of our first Diversity and Inclusion conference.

The initial cohort of Diversity Practitioners and Chaplains convened again in June, 2019 with an expanded list of participants. The goal of this meeting—in addition to relationship building—was to keep growing the wisdom and energy from Atlanta while also expanding the representativeness of the planning committee. A theme, timeline, and structure was laid out for the upcoming Diversity and Inclusion conference. Also discussed was the implementation of an online discussion forum.

The work funded by the Edward E. Ford Foundation grant has been taken up eagerly by our schools, and the conference held March 4-6th 2020 at the Maritime Center in Baltimore, MD was a rewarding culmination of this first phase of the programming. At every stage of the public launch of the conference, the response exceeded expectations, from the call for workshop proposals through registration. (Despite initial projections of 40-50 attendees, we had nearly 100!)

The conference provided a demonstration of how fruitful the groundwork had been. Through solid relationship building and meeting the need to connect with peers, the planning committee managed to prepare an event that was at the same time highly focused while also being relevant



Q&A

Q: Can you tell us about a bit about your experience of NAES's first conference on Diversity and Inclusion?

Attendee: This first conference was an incredible way to start a new tradition for NAES. DEI is powerful, life-changing, exhausting work and it was wonderful to feel the support of all who attended. The best part was being able to hear the successes and road blocks of all of the attendees. It was so great to make connections not only with other educators in Florida, but all over the U.S.

Q: Will you share your thoughts on the intersection of Episcopal Identity and Diversity and Inclusion?

Attendee: This is such an intriguing topic. Our Episcopal Identity certainly lends itself to DEI work in our schools. Regardless of what faith we are, it is part of being human to practice this work.

Q: Why do you think it is important for NAES to play an active role in supporting those doing Diversity and Inclusion in our schools?

Attendee: My belief is that so many teachers, families, administrators, and other members of our school community still do not necessarily see the need for this type of work in our schools. They may not completely understand the bigger issues revolving around DEI in schools. It is extremely difficult for some people who are trying to make changes in their schools if they do not have the support of those around them. If NAES continues to make this a priority, it will really help all involved. Knowing that we are getting our directions from NAES gives us feet to stand on.

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For me, my biggest takeaway was a stronger sense that our Episcopal Identity positions us to lean into conversations and discussions that focus on DEI work because of the nature of our baptismal vows. Going along with this is the understanding that being Episcopal does not mean that we've arrived or that we have the answers, but rather that we do have the tools to focus on this work. Finally, I came away with a deeper understanding that EI is so closely associated with whiteness and that we have much work to do in the areas of DEI!

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for attendees whose engagement with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion spanned a broad spectrum. Plenary speakers were provocative and inspiring. The workshops were thoughtful and actionable. Given the intention of NAES's engagement in this work, it was gratifying to receive feedback from Chaplains realizing the importance of their support for this work. In the words of one Chaplain; "My key takeaway is to support these [Racial Equity] team members in any way I can

and be a co-conspirator for them." This did not go unnoticed by their colleagues. From a Diversity Practitioner, a key takeaway was "my Chaplain hearing how to use the DEI practitioner and Chaplain role together." Amplifying a clear and unified voice from those doing this work in Episcopal schools daily, and seeing that message resonate among those with administrative and programmatic influence can be counted as a significant outcome from the gathering.

During the conference, attendees broke out by region during an evening discussion. This, along with the launch of the online community on the NAES website are items indicating our forward progression in completing the programs laid out in our grant. With the emergence of the Covid19 pandemic, NAES launched regularly occurring chats (via Zoom) for Diversity Practitioners. Certainly, these were not planned. The meetings do, however, meet with the spirit of our proposal—to reinforce the intersection of Episcopal Identity with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion—while nurturing and supporting those tasked with this work in Episcopal schools. As the crisis has exposed the very real disparities that exist, even within our school communities, this moment may present a valuable opportunity to clarify what inclusion really looks

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The biggest takeaways for me were the contacts and connections that I made with educators from other Episcopal schools.

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like. We are exceedingly grateful to the Edward E. Ford Foundation for contributing to the critical groundwork, upon which we now stand firmly to generate the possibility for transformational change.



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My own critiques and concerns about the history, character, quandaries, and purposes of our schools are well founded. The conference and future gatherings are a rare opportunity to speak honestly about those issues and create a new future that has grappled with its past. Motivated people of faith with a shared commitment to education and justice like these colleagues should be able to delve into this. It's a unique opportunity.

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