



**National Association
of Episcopal Schools**
Excellence Through Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NAES RELEASES INCLUSION AND EPISCOPAL IDENTITY STATEMENT

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, OCTOBER 5, 2021—The National Association of Episcopal Schools (NAES) has released the following statement concerning the relationship between the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion and Episcopal identity. This statement was affirmed and endorsed by the NAES Governing Board during its September 2021 meeting.

NAES Statement on Inclusion and Episcopal Identity

Among the many important issues Episcopal schools have faced, over the months of this pandemic, one has been the increasingly compelling need to focus on being more inclusive, just communities. A great many people in our school communities have welcomed this focus and the programs it has spawned; at the same time, many schools have been subject to criticism and scrutiny, as individuals and groups claim that the school has forsaken its mission, in many cases viewing it as contrary to what it means to be a Christian school.

The staff and Governing Board of the National Association of Episcopal Schools are eager to take this opportunity to re-assert that our identity and mission as an Episcopal school are, by nature and theology, bound up inextricably with becoming more inclusive communities. We feel that it is time to remind all of the constituencies in our schools that our commitment to racial justice, and the honoring of the many ways in which human beings differ in our country today, is fundamental to what it means to be an Episcopal school, and the particular expression of Christianity to which our Episcopal schools are tied.

We call on our school boards to spend time discussing the nature and mission of Episcopal schools, our admissions professionals to be intentional in sharing with families our Episcopal mission and how it might differ from other Christian perspectives, and for schools to work with parents in helping them understand what Episcopal schools do and why. We at NAES stand ready to be of help in equipping these and all members of our school communities in these conversations and explorations.

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A Reaffirmation of Our Core Belief

Episcopal schools ground their commitment to diversity, inclusion, justice and equity in the words of the Baptismal Covenant, and our promise as Christians to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself,” and, “to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.” That pledge to respect the dignity of every human being includes how we differ from one another, as well as how we share a common humanity and reflect the image of God. It serves as a guide to our daily need to act with compassion, love and integrity, as well as to name and challenge behaviors that promote exclusion, intolerance, and mistrust.

As Episcopal schools we also are the beneficiaries of a strong intellectual tradition, characterized by questioning and probing further into the ideals and beliefs that ground us. This means often entering into difficult conversations on matters of how we differ from each other, instead of sidestepping them. Those conversations are characterized by the honoring of others, not the shaming or dismissing of some, and offer us opportunities to learn about ourselves as well as each other. These honorable conversations are needed among the adults in the community, not just students.

Our tradition is one of graciousness, generosity, and humility—we do not possess all of the answers, and we are eager to learn from each other. One of the best vehicles for enhancing that learning is the intentional cultivation of a diverse community, one that is welcomed into the total life of the school. A sense of belonging is essential to a climate of learning, and serves as the optimal mode of preparation for our students’ futures.

Our schools’ awakening to the urgency of the moment is not just an “add on,” but a return to and a renewed appreciation of the sources of our belief and action. What we reiterate here is not something novel, nor does it serve as a cover for any agenda other than the moral and theological expression of our deepest convictions, commitments, and understandings of who we are as a community.

Episcopal schools are places where people from all different types of perspectives and traditions show up and engage in the joyful process of learning. This is not only what we are supposed to do, but what we love to do. In these ways we share with what many fine schools of different traditions do. What makes us unique is the theological foundation we draw from and lead with, the source of all that inspires us to be proud, courageous and welcoming in our inclusive approach to learning. We were created by God to do and be these very things.

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A Few Important Definitions:

DIVERSITY—The intentional development of school communities where people of different backgrounds and points of view come together as a body. Diversity is both a source of strength and a primary means of enhancing the intellectual, social, spiritual and moral life of the school. (Rev. 7:9-10)

INCLUSION—Beyond the sheer presence of a diverse group of people, inclusion is the process by which members of the community honor one another, welcome many voices, and work toward the ongoing broadening of the community's horizons. (Romans 15:7)

EQUITY—Equity is the condition where fairness and faithfulness thrive, and all members of the community are respected for their inherent dignity as human beings and capacity to contribute to the building up of the common life. (Psalm 33:5)

JUSTICE—The courageous and continual attention to and advocacy on behalf of those most vulnerable in the community. (Proverbs 31:8-9)

DIGNITY—Dignity speaks to the inherent worth of all human beings, what human beings strive to be seen as possessing, and the primary lens through which we view all human beings. (Gal. 3:28)

The National Association of Episcopal Schools (NAES) is an independent 501(c)(3), voluntary membership organization that supports, serves, and advocates for the vital work and ministry of those who serve nearly 1,200 Episcopal schools, early childhood education programs, and school establishment efforts throughout The Episcopal Church. Chartered in 1965, with historic roots dating to the 1930s, NAES is the only pre-collegiate educational association that is both national in scope and Episcopal in character. The association advances Episcopal education and strengthens Episcopal schools through essential services, resources, conferences, and networking opportunities on Episcopal school identity, leadership, and governance, and on the spiritual and professional development of school leaders.

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