DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Next Step \textsc{Forward}

\textsc{By Nikki Turpin, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Chapel Hill-Chauncy Hall}

The terms Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) may feel like buzzwords from recent years. But many people—teachers, principals, superintendents—have long been doing this work without a formal title. Now that the work has a name, it has also found a much-needed recognized place within school communities. Many schools have recently come to understand the importance of establishing a position dedicated to DEI. But the importance of this position is especially significant at independent and private schools, nearly all of which benefited from white parents not wanting their children to attend desegregated schools. Many Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) are working to ensure that they no longer hold these ugly truths within their current school walls. They are
working toward creating more equitable spaces—not just in terms of their overall student body, faculty, and staff, but in how they represent and discuss communities that are not and cannot be within their own.

Teachers have been adding feverishly to curricula that are absent for marginalized groups throughout the world. They have been standing up, speaking out, and taking a stance for their students and others who must fight to exist as free citizens in a country that has continuously demonstrated that their lives don’t matter and that they are not equally free citizens. They are making a point to say, “I care, and I love you, and I will do everything I can to make sure others see and know just how important you are.” This amazing work by our teachers is not surprising because it is rare to find a teacher who doesn’t care passionately about the person right in front of them whom they are nurturing.

But all of this can be exhausting. As many people who have been doing DEI work have pointed out, it’s not easy. There is no textbook, there’s no degree. It’s just doing the work and investing in it from your heart. So how do you begin doing a job that is best done when there is no applause or accolades? How do you begin speaking for those who might not be at the table, and how do you ensure that your students leave your space with the empathy to stand up for those same people when you’re not around? I don’t have all of the answers, but I know that there are several steps you can take to find your own.

The work begins by each school answering these critical questions:

- **Do you have a DEI practitioner or committee?** This is important, and in fact, it is the only way this work can truly begin. People have to be held accountable for making sure they understand and are aware of their own biases. It is not enough to say that it is everyone’s job. There has to be someone holding people accountable to do the work.

- **How are the checks and balances happening?** Many institutions seek out consultants to survey them to assess where they are. You can easily begin this work yourself through community surveys and conversations and a review of the curriculum.

- **Are you teaching the holes in the story?** Begin identifying and assigning an individual (or individuals) who can guide the school to ensure that students are connected to the unknown or lesser-known parts of stories, whether it be history, English, or math. As the African proverb states, “Until the lions have their own historians, tales of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.”

- **Who does the curriculum elevate? If you are using periodic text, how are you balancing the narrator?** For example, some people might think you can’t teach about injustice in math class, but you can use real data about the water situation in Flint as your true-life data set for a lesson. This can lead to further discussions of the conditions that lead to such inequity.

- **Do you have a strategic plan for DEI?** Goals sometimes seem overwhelming, but a strategic plan to advance your school’s DEI initiatives is a great way to ensure that you are getting done what needs to get done. You can go back and survey yourself two, three, or five years after to see what exactly you accomplished and to determine what work remains.

- **Are you invested in the community surrounding you?** Bring the outside world in. Where are you located? Which programs already exist? With whom can you collaborate to bring in voices that might not be typically heard within your school?

- **Where are your alumni?** Can you invite alumni in to share their experiences, both during their time at school and after? Hearing what your school needs from those who’ve experienced it firsthand is a sobering yet necessary step.

- **Who is at the table? Is their voice heard, and are they seen?** It is not enough to say that the matters and issues of DEI are everyone’s job to bring to the table. The question is if there is someone at the table looking through all pieces and topics. Does this person get to interact with the Board in an honest and meaningful way? Is the Board open to hearing from them and inclusive of their feelings and thoughts?

Answering these questions will provide a starting point for your DEI efforts. While you may not like some of what you discover, remember that these problems had likely existed long before you knew about them. Now that you do, you can begin the path to creating an equitable school for all. Now that you are woke, it’s time to become rooted.

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**NIKKI’S RECOMMENDATIONS**

**READ:**
- *How the Word Is Passed* by Clint Smith
- *NYT 1619 Project* by Colson Whitehead
- *The Warmth of Other Suns* by Isabel Wilkerson

**FOLLOW (WEB + SOCIAL):**
- Rachel Cargle

**LISTEN (PODCASTS):**
- *Pod Save the People*
- *American History Tellers*

**WATCH:**
- *Lovecraft Country*
- *Pose*
- *Horror Noir*

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—NIKKI TURPIN, CHAPEL HILL-CHAUNCY HALL SCHOOL

NIKKI TURPIN (she/her/hers) is the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Chapel Hill-Chauncy Hall in Waltham, MA. A former teacher at Nashoba Brooks School in Concord, MA, she sits on multiple inclusivity and diversity boards, including the Bay State Brawlers and Hudson River Sloop Clearwater. She is the Programming Director for Robbins House in Concord, MA, and was the leader of the Youth in Philanthropy Program at Middlesex School for Foundation for MetroWest. She has held a passion for African-American history and recently presented at the Association of African American Museums, discussing the importance of telling the full stories of African-American female suffragists. She has presented and run Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion workshops at ACA New England, The National Humanities Conference, GLAD Legal Advocates and Defenders, Concord Recreation, Jewish Family and Children’s Services, and Boys and Girls Clubs of Boston, leading their professional development and leadership institute. Nikki has worked in public, private, and independent education for over a decade.