EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION UPDATE

ST. MICHAELS UNIVERSITY SCHOOL
April 21, 2022

Revised Dec. 6, 2022

Draft consolidated by Moussa Magassa, PhD

Executive Summary

Respect is a core value of our community. When we are at our best, it is alive in every interaction and decision. At the same time, we know that we have much to learn, including what it means to be a fully equitable, diverse, and inclusive community.

In September of 2020, a Working Group was formed and staffed by Becky Anderson (Chair), Keith Driscoll, and Keven Fletcher. This group's findings led to the recommendation that an experienced consultant be retained and that an Advisory Committee be struck. Dr. Moussa Magassa, a prominent EDI and Human Rights Educator was hired and subsequently guided the selection of our 15 member Advisory Committee which reflects a variety of stakeholder groups. This include representation from our students, alumni, faculty, parents, representing immigrants, persons with disabilities, BIPOC, LGBTQ2+, and a wide range of socio-economic groups.

Over 750 individuals responded to a 38-question survey drafted by the Advisory Committee that identified groups according to SMUS' EDI Statement (I.e.sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, ability, appearance, ethnicity, culture, race, beliefs, and socio-economic background). This survey, along with a series of focus groups and individual consultations, identified two understandings within our community that are simultaneously true. First, there is a strong, general sense of pride in the school. Second, there is a frank recognition that specific areas of our practice require concrete improvement.

In response to the survey, focus group, and individual interviews data, the Advisory Committee began to shape recommendations for the Board of Governors' consideration. The first set of recommendations was categorised according to common themes and the needs of various stakeholder groups - SMUS' commitment to EDI, leadership/faculty diversity, the role of socioeconomic status diversity, gender and sexuality, disability and accessibility, and anti-racism work. The recommendations were then re-ordered to target operational areas - facilities and infrastructure, policy and procedures, human resources, student life and curriculum. These complete, detailed recommendations are available to the Head of School. What follows is a summary.

1. EDI Implementation and Oversight Person(s)

That the school appoints a person (or persons) with specific responsibility regarding the implementation of recommendations created by the Advisory Committee and approved by the Board. This person would be accountable for overseeing the coordination of collaborative processes that will be central to the success of our work. This person is not responsible for making final decisions, but rather for establishing processes that lead to those decisions being made at the level required.

This person would bring sufficient experience to navigate these processes as an overriding priority of their position at the school. Such an individual would need to possess a general knowledge of EDI, rather than specific expertise in *every* area. In helping us to progress, the individual would be capable of being a change agent where appropriate, while still holding the ethos and strengths of the school at heart.

The school will actively seek to recruit such a person globally. If in the current labour market, we are unable to find a suitable candidate, then an alternate approach will be taken to provide short-term oversight and implementation, so that we maintain as much momentum as possible while we continue the search.

This person/s would be supported with access and resources to fulfill a mandate which:

- positions the School to act on the recommendations, including the establishment of plans and timelines
- impacts decision-making at all levels within the School
- acts as a point of support and reporting for students and staff who experience or require conversation around discrimination
- works with the SLT and others to create a plan in response to the Advisory Committee's recommendations; and
- communicates with the wider School community about the content and ongoing progress of these initiatives.

2. Policy and Procedures

That the school reviews, amends, and/or develops new policies and procedures to position the school to reflect best practices related to EDI. This would include input from the EDI Implementation and Oversight Person(s), external experts, lead schools, and participation in professional networks.

Some key examples that arose from the survey, focus groups, and interviews centred on:

- creating a clear policy and process for students, families, and staff, with regards to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) and an individual's preference for identity/identification across all aspects of school life. These policies and processes would be created with external expertise to reflect age-and-stage considerations, along with the divisional structure of our school, all while adhering to Ministry requirements and our core values
- reviewing uniforms and appearance policies in Junior, Middle, and Senior Schools, and communicating the evolution behind changes to better reflect the goals of a school uniform and recognition of diversity
- reviewing the content in our publications with an EDI lens prior to being shared with our community
- ensuring the clarity of school policy, as it relates to peer conflict, mean behaviour, and bullying with explicit references to discriminatory acts and the process by which to report such incidents
- developing policies and processes that minimize the impact of unintentional or unconscious bias when accessing education as a student, employment as a staff member, or board membership as a volunteer; and
- exploring new advances and approaches to support learning resources and mental health.

3. Student Life/Curriculum

That the school fosters a broader sense of belonging by reviewing and considering key communal and educational aspects of the school. These gatherings and approaches should be structured and organized to position the school to reflect key aspects of EDI as visible and presented through different mediums. Collectively, they play a significant role in establishing community norms and supporting the School's Core Values.

To this end, the Advisory Committee recommends that the school:

- reviews Community Time (i.e.Chapel, Assemblies, Grade-out meetings, Homeroom, and special events) at the Junior, Middle and Senior Schools and uses these gatherings in part as opportunities to explore our diversity, support our values, and generate reflection
- reviews the prevalence of Christian language, symbols, and traditions in an effort to continue to expand the range of belief systems and worldviews represented, and to align with our school's identity as secular. Such a review would include creating an inventory of current religious practices and the articulation of a clear statement about our continued practice, finding ways to reflect both the part of our identity which

cherishes these practices and the part of our identity which sees itself as secular. In this way, we can be thoughtful about the way these traditional practices manifest today
- reviews its programming (co- and extra-curricular) to consider how best to incorporate local and global opportunities and organizations, prioritising partnerships in order to meet the needs of our diverse student population
- reviews library resources from an EDI perspective, including the overall balance of voices, the approach to highlighting diverse authors/materials, and the method of categorising subjects. The intent of the review is to promote access to a broader range of voices, rather than eliminating particular voices
- reviews the language, content and exemplars used in teaching materials, classrooms, and community spaces to position these to be inclusive of all aspects of diversity
- creates educational events and opportunities for reflection that reaches students at various grade levels, their caregivers, faculty, staff, and Board members around EDI related issues; and
- explores inclusive alternatives within programs that have traditionally been gender-specific, such as PE classes, outdoor education, athletics, and boarding.

4. Facilities and Infrastructure

That the school takes steps to adapt its facilities and infrastructure and seeks opportunities to create an inclusive environment for all people.

The Advisory Committee noted the need to create:

- an environment that promotes and attracts students and staff who require accessibility adaptations like ramps, sound systems, and non-gendered bathrooms
- signage and maps that highlight these systems and spaces, and are both physically and virtually available
- an environment where a variety of cultures are explicitly portrayed and celebrated
- a website that is accessible in terms of how it will be received by various diversity groups and experienced by the visually impaired; and
- publications and messaging that reflect our commitment to diversity by positioning our Marketing and Communications team with appropriate support.

5. Professional Development

That the school incorporates into its Professional Development specific, core elements of EDI, including basic understandings of the historical underpinnings leading to discrimination.

The Advisory Committee noted the need to:

- position the faculty and staff to devote part of their annual learning to EDI content through some combination of onboarding, professional growth plans, curriculum development, and/or training workshops
- provide periodic training for teachers and administrators on expectations and how to address issues of mean behaviour, peer conflict, and bullying around areas of discrimination, whether between adults, students, or a combination of both
- provide training to faculty and staff on how to support the mental health and neurodiversity needs of our students
- train all staff on the significance of providing pronouns in introductions, email signatures, etc., to create a welcoming environment for students of all genders; and
- position the faculty to be prepared when engaging in conversations about EDI and associated topics, including the creation of safe environments.

6. Human Resources

That the school actively diversifies its hiring pool of potential teachers, staff and school leaders to better reflect our global outlook and our existing students. In conversation with selected candidates from identified diversity groups, we will develop individualised support systems to foster a sense of belonging and community. Our goal is to create diverse pools of well-qualified applicants, rather than to impose set quotas.

To meet this goal, the Advisory Committee recommends that the school:

- conducts an external review of our hiring practices, including the development of an explicit strategy to increase representation at all stages of recruitment, hiring, and retention
- collects baseline EDI data with respect to the current staff and faculty, following best practices for self-declaration; and
- expands strategies to support the recruitment of candidates that address already identified gaps in representation, such as the Indigenous Scholar program.

The EDI Advisory Committee:

- Shafiq Ebrahim
- Jennifer Fletcher
- Douglas Freeman '88
- Jessica Hanna
- Lyra Higgs '21
- Miranda Ji
- Wonjin Kim '10
- Paris Lowe '14
- David Lynch '98
- Katie Martí
- Mona Mazgani
- Jody Nishima
- Gaby Shipley '22
- Subaig Sindhar '22
- Grace Vickers '21
- Cassandra Zawilski '08