Diversity
Equity &
Inclusion
Harvard-Westlake recognizes that diversity, equity, and inclusion are integral and not antithetical to educational excellence. To cultivate an environment based on such values, we must focus our efforts intentionally and create authentic, meaningful, lasting change. We believe, as well, that achieving our vision and enabling every member of the community to feel an equal sense of belonging is beneficial not only to our community but also to society and our world. While the work is not at all easy, it is imperative that we continue our efforts earnestly and diligently.

JANINE HANCOCK JONES, DIRECTOR OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION
AFFINITY GROUPS

Affinity groups bring people together in a shared space to learn about, recognize, and celebrate a specific identity, whether race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or religion. We pride ourselves on the fact that our groups are open to all interested students.

SLIDE (Student Leaders for Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity) is comprised of the leaders of numerous student affinity groups, including Asian American Culture Club (AACC), Asian Students in Action (ASiA), Black Leadership Awareness and Culture Club (BLACC), Boot Squad, Empower (upper school female empowerment group), Gender and Sexuality Awareness (GSA), the Jewish Club, Latin American Hispanic Student Organization (LAHSAO), Middle Eastern Student Association (MESA), Middle Eastern Affinity Club (MEAC), Multi Ethnic Club, Ms. Simon Says Girls Club (middle school female empowerment group), South Asian Student Association, and Women of Color, along with their faculty advisors and the DEI office. SLIDE works individually and collectively to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion are present in all aspects of the HW community. The group meets regularly to collaborate on events and to serve as a support system for member groups.
CIVIL RIGHTS TOUR

Students and teachers engage with history annually by exploring the sites of the Civil Rights Movement, creating a bridge between classroom knowledge and lived experience. We see where Rosa Parks boarded the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, kicking off the Civil Rights Movement. We visit the basement of a house that made up part of the underground railroad and go to the new National Memorial for Peace and Justice, contending with the history of lynching as we read metal planks listing the names of those lynched. We sit in the church where Martin Luther King Jr. preached and stand at the site of his assassination. The trip gives students a moving, meaningful, and powerful experience connecting to significant aspects of U.S. history.

“THE CREATORS OF THE LYNCHING MEMORIAL SUSPENDED METAL SLABS FROM TREES TO MIMIC BODIES, FORCING THE OBSERVER TO CONTEMPLATE THE AWFUL SCENE OF A PUBLIC LYNCHING. I COULDN’T HELP BUT LOOK FOR EVIDENCE OF MY LINEAGE ON THE SLABS, AND WATCH THE OTHER ADULTS AND KIDS DO THE SAME.”

CHRIS JONES, UPPER SCHOOL DEAN
STUDENT DIVERSITY LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Every fall, Harvard-Westlake sends six students to the Student Diversity Leadership Conference, a multiracial, multicultural gathering of high school student leaders from across the United States and abroad. The conference focuses on self-reflection, forming allies, and building community. Students develop global communication skills, design effective strategies for social justice practice through dialogue, and learn the foundations of allyship and networking principles. Students return from SDLC to share what they have learned with their peers and often say that it was a life-changing experience.

“TO ME, SDLC MEANS ENLIGHTENMENT. I BELIEVED MYSELF TO BE PRETTY EDUCATED REGARDING CULTURE, SOCIAL ISSUES, AND DIVERSITY, BUT SDLC OPENED MY EYES TO THE FACT THAT I HAD MUCH MORE TO LEARN. SDLC TAUGHT ME PRINCIPLES THAT CAN’T BE LEARNED IN A CLASSROOM, SUCH AS LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND WAYS TO BE AN ALLY AND EDUCATE OTHERS. THE THING THAT I VALUE THE MOST FROM MY SDLC EXPERIENCE, HOWEVER, WAS THE EXPOSURE TO MANY DIFFERENT PEOPLE FROM VARIOUS BACKGROUNDS AND THE INTRODUCTION TO NEW VIEWPOINTS AND PERSPECTIVES. I MADE A LOT OF FRIENDS AT SDLC, BECAME MUCH MORE AWARE, AND SEE THE WORLD IN A DIFFERENT WAY NOW.”

DANIEL N., CLASS OF 2021
CONFERENCES & EVENTS

DIVERSITY RECRUITING FAIR
Harvard-Westlake hosted the inaugural Southern California Diversity Recruiting Fair in February 2019 and continues to host it annually on our upper school campus. The primary goal of the fair is to expose independent schools to numerous job candidates from underrepresented groups at one time. This fair also gives attendees the opportunity to learn about working in an independent school, build resume writing and interviewing skills, find out about open positions, and incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion into their work.

PEOPLE OF COLOR CONFERENCE
The People of Color Conference is hosted annually by the National Association of Independent Schools. The mission of the conference is “to provide a safe space for leadership and professional development and networking for people of color and allies of all backgrounds in independent schools.” Harvard-Westlake has participated in the conference since its inception more than 30 years ago and for the past few years has sent more than 25 employees annually.

POLLYANNA
Every fall, Harvard-Westlake hosts the Pollyanna Conference to explore DEI-related topics and share ideas that encourage participants to become agents of change in their communities. Previous themes have included exploring structural racism, understanding implicit bias, and reimagining gender/sexual orientation in schools.

"THE DEPTH AND AUTHENTICITY OF THE CONVERSATIONS AND THE GROWTH-ORIENTED MINDSET LEFT ME FEELING SO INSPIRED TO CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION AND DEVOTE MY TIME AND ENERGY TO DEI WORK. HEARING THE KIDS SPEAK WAS ENLIGHTENING, AND I WAS TOUCHED BY HOW COURAGEOUS AND ARTICULATE THEY WERE. BEING A POLLYANNA OF Sorts MYSELF, I BELIEVE THAT WITH HOPE, OPTIMISM, AND REAL-TIME CONVERSATION, WE CAN WORK TOGETHER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE."

LAURIE WOLKE, HEAD OF LAURENCE SCHOOL
CURRICULUM AWARENESS
Research shows that a diverse curriculum unequivocally benefits all students. Harvard-Westlake embraces this research and has taken steps to incorporate it into classes, revamping our history courses to focus more on the world (rather than just Europe), adopting the singular “they,” and including texts that provide a counternarrative to more traditional choices.

DIVERSITY COUNCIL
In the 2018–2019 school year, Harvard-Westlake formed the inaugural Diversity Council. The 30-member council was comprised of a cross-section of the community, including faculty, staff, senior administrators, parents, and alums. The council conducted a strengths-and-weaknesses analysis, consulted experts, researched proven practices, and created a DEI philosophy and a set of goals.

GENDER AWARENESS
We strive to create an environment where all genders are valued. Recent changes have included removing gendered language from HW publications and classrooms wherever possible, creating gender-neutral bathrooms, and removing gender designations from elected positions such as prom court and the student ambassador program.

LEARNING SPECIALISTS
Harvard-Westlake supports diverse learners, from students facing emotional challenges to those with learning disabilities.

“EVERYONE DOESN’T THINK, LEARN, OR PROCESS INFORMATION IN THE SAME WAY. WE LET STUDENTS KNOW THAT THAT’S OKAY. WE’RE HERE TO HELP THEM PINPOINT EXACTLY WHAT’S GOING ON IN THEIR BRAINS AND ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS.”
JENN GABRAIL, LEARNING RESOURCE SPECIALIST
FOUR AGREEMENTS OF COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS PLUS THREE

1. STAY ENGAGED
2. EXPERIENCE DISCOMFORT
3. SPEAK YOUR TRUTH
4. EXPECT AND ACCEPT NON-CLOSURE
5. KEEP AN OPEN MIND
6. ASSUME GOOD INTENTIONS
7. ALWAYS BE RESPECTFUL
Brown Bag Lunches

During the school year, faculty and staff gather monthly to break bread together and discuss significant topics, such as the model minority myth, culturally responsive teaching practices, and gender in today’s world.

Implicit Bias Training

Employees at Harvard-Westlake undergo training to increase cultural awareness and learn strategies to reduce their own implicit biases in an open and understanding environment.

New Faculty/Staff DEI Training

Each school year begins with a two-day session to build new employees’ cultural awareness and understanding. The school brings in an internationally renowned expert known for his expertise on matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

“I REALLY FELT THIS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY HELPED ME GROW. I AM BEGINNING MY SEVENTEENTH YEAR TEACHING AND HAVE A LOT OF EXPERIENCE WITH DIFFERENT KINDS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. I CAN HONESTLY SAY THIS ONE IS AT THE TOP OF MY LIST OF MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITIES.”

Anonymous Harvard-Westlake Faculty Member
SAFE SPACE TRAINING
Faculty and staff participate in LGBTQ+ Safe Space Training sessions, in which they learn about concepts related to gender identity, gender expression, assigned sex at birth, and sexual orientation. Participants use this knowledge to consider how they can better support, include, and value LGBTQ+ members of the Harvard-Westlake community.

SPEAKERS
Diversity, equity, and inclusion is a consideration for every guest speaker, but we also regularly bring in speakers to address a variety of DEI topics specifically.

SUMMER READING
Each summer, Harvard-Westlake faculty and staff read a book focused on a particular diversity, equity, and inclusion theme. Some examples include Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do by Dr. Claude Steele, Safe Is Not Enough: Better Schools for LGBTQ Students by Michael Sadowski, and Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People by Dr. Mahzarin Banaji and Dr. Anthony Greenwald.

Dr. Tricia Rose is a professor and director of the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America as well as an author and speaker on 20th century African American culture and politics, social thought, popular culture, and gender issues. She spoke to the Harvard-Westlake community about structural racism.

Ms. Rosetta Lee, the outreach specialist at Seattle Girls School and a highly sought-after speaker on topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion, spoke at Harvard-Westlake about microaggressions.
“THE CONCEPT OF DIVERSITY AS ESSENTIAL TO EXCELLENCE IS WELL KNOWN, BUT BRINGING THAT CONCEPT TO LIFE REQUIRES DEEP AND ABIDING COMMITMENT. HARVARD-WESTLAKE EXPRESSES IT THIS WAY: ‘OUR COMMITMENT TO INCLUSION WILL ENABLE EVERY MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY TO FEEL AN EQUAL SENSE OF BELONGING.’ THAT’S A BOLD ASPIRATION IN A WORLD SO OFTEN DIVIDED BY DIFFERENCES OF RACE, RELIGION, IDENTITY, OR BACKGROUND, BUT WE BELIEVE THAT HARVARD-WESTLAKE MUST STRIVE FOR THIS IDEAL, AND WE MUST REDOUBLE OUR EFFORTS WHENEVER AND WHEREVER WE FALL SHORT. WITHOUT AN ‘EQUAL SENSE OF BELONGING,’ OUR COMMUNITY’S ACCOMPLISHMENTS MEAN LITTLE, AND ALL OUR ACCOLADES RING HOLLOW.”

RICK COMMONS, PRESIDENT AND HEAD OF SCHOOL