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## Emerging DEI Themes and Planning

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### Overview

Over the last few months, hundreds of powerfully honest stories have been shared by Nobles Black and brown students and graduates, stories that speak to hurtful experiences at Nobles over a span of decades around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). In my first three years at Nobles, I have heard too many stories from students and graduates who were discriminated against because of their race, ethnicity, sexuality, or religion. The impact of these heartfelt and often heartbreaking reflections is palpable, and they represent a call to action for our school at this pivotal time in our nation's history, as we confront the ongoing systemic injustices that we need to commit to change.

These stories from Nobles students and graduates resonate strongly with the work we have been embarking upon over the last few years, and many of the steps we put into motion last year were initiated to address the themes we are hearing very clearly now. The stories we are hearing from our Black, brown, queer and transgender students and graduates highlight the tremendous intersectionality of our students' multiple marginalized identities that we need to recognize as we embark upon this critical work. The stories being told only strengthen our commitment to the work begun, and they have led us to broaden, deepen, and expedite several important plans.

We all feel a clear urgency to begin this work, and we will take some immediate steps this fall in several areas. We are also making a strong commitment to enduring, long-term change. We have just begun a comprehensive climate assessment, which will audit all areas of our school through a DEI lens. Alison Park, from Blink Consulting, is leading this study, the results of which will only further our understanding of our challenges, opportunities, and work ahead.

The stories we hear from Nobles students of color in the years to come simply must be different, and we are accountable as a school to make that happen. I remain grateful for your tremendous ongoing support and partnership in ensuring the Nobles community continues to move towards greater equity and inclusion for all its members.

Below are the five clear theme that have resonated from over recent months and years in the stories shared by Nobles students and graduates of color, along with our strong commitments to short term work and long term enduring change.

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## **Theme 1**

### **Student Cultural Competency and Clarity of Community Norms and Principles**

Stories shared have highlighted that Nobles students need greater cultural competency around essential equity and justice issues. The stories also emphasize that the school is not publicly clear enough about what is and is not expected of Nobles students, as well as what the consequences of violating those norms will be.

#### **Fall 2020 Action Steps**

1. **Required student programming Grades 7-9:** We will begin implementing important programming to ensure that every Nobles student is equipped with knowledge, skills, and resources essential for our entire community to have a shared understanding of our core principles around equity and inclusion.
  - **Middle School Personal Development:** The 7th and 8th grade Personal Development courses have been reformulated over the last several months using the lens of identity and inclusion. The new curriculum will be implemented this fall.
  - **9th Grade Personal Development:** All 9th grade students will have a semester-long course through our Personal Development program led by the Social Justice Leadership Institute (SJLI) beginning this fall. [SJLI is under the Boston Mobilization Organization](#). The purpose of this pilot program is to provide our students with a deeper understanding of systemic issues around race, religion, class, gender, and sexuality; tools to recognize and interrupt microaggressions; and opportunities to promote personal identity development. We began planning this course last winter, and are thrilled to partner with SJLI to pilot the program this fall. This pilot program will need to be studied, deepened, and expanded in the long term to ensure every Nobles student graduates having experienced this critical learning. Additionally, last year Nobles piloted a semester-long Sex Ed PD class for 9th graders based on a modified version of the Our Whole Lives curriculum. This is a comprehensive, sex-ed curriculum that is inclusive of all genders and orientations in its discussions of identity development, healthy relationships, care, compassion, respect and justice.
2. **Discipline:**
  - **Community Principles:** Based on what we have heard from current and former students, it is clear there needs to be a public stance shared around how we approach discriminatory behavior, both on and off campus, that violates Nobles' community principles, particularly as it relates to racist, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, homophobic, and transphobic language and actions. While we have established clear internal systems and practices for discipline and education around DEI issues, we have not shared them publicly enough. Our philosophy and practice of not using specific disciplinary cases to

teach our principles in ways that humiliate individual students has met our mission, but has also left our community unclear what our stance is on key DEI norm violations.

This fall, we will share a public document with our students, faculty, and staff that explicitly states our principles around core DEI tenets, including our approach to violations of those norms. We will not be changing our stance in maintaining confidentiality around student discipline, but will seek ways to address proactively and educationally the issues that surface in a way that upholds our principles.

- **Education:** We will be adding an educational component to every discipline case. While we have begun to do this more frequently with individual discipline cases, particularly cases related to DEI issues, we will formalize this process to ensure it is embedded in our process every time. Part of this process will be establishing a bank of resources and programming that we can draw upon when these issues emerge. We will be considering the restorative justice framework to guide this critical part of the learning for both the students involved and our broader community.

## Long-Term Work

1. **Daily Discipline Review:** Many of the stories and concerns we are hearing about discipline from current and former students are about the day-to-day interactions with adults, where students of color feel called out disproportionately from their white peers. While we will conduct a deeper audit this year of our Discipline Committee work to evaluate for bias, there is a different layer of microaggressions our students share they experience that are less formal and more embedded in the daily experience. We need to better understand how daily discipline is experienced in varied ways by our students. Our climate assessment, which will begin this fall, will directly address this concern.
2. **Unreported Racism:** One significant and acutely painful theme we have seen is the degree to which our students of color experience both ignorant and intentional racism with peers that is unheard and unseen by adults and is never reported or addressed. The @BlackatNobles Instagram posts speak to this theme consistently, and it has been shared in many stories from younger graduates in particular. These students also report that the social stakes of sharing these incidents with adults is high.

While a systemic issue that is broader than Nobles in its history and scope, unreported racist acts are happening in our hallways and through Nobles social channels regularly, and the hurt is tremendous. We are hopeful our climate assessment deepens our understanding of where and how this occurs at Nobles, and that we emerge with some guideposts that will direct us towards greater progress. We are hopeful our public statements around our community DEI norms and how we address violations will help, as will the additional steps detailed below around student support. While this is one of the more important and challenging areas for us to address, it is also one that is most deeply hurtful and impactful for our students of color in their experience at Nobles.

3. ***Training for Student Leaders:*** Last August, we initiated new programming for all athletic team captains. Jill Walsh led this session, which was the start of leadership programming we believe we need to expand. We are partnering with the Social Justice Leadership Institute (SJLI) to hold training sessions for Class II leaders and all Class I students this fall. This training will address issues of DEI in both broad and specific ways as we seek to engage our student leadership in understanding and owning our path forward within our student community towards greater inclusion.
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## **Theme 2**

### **Professional Development for Faculty**

The stories we are hearing make clear the need for Nobles' leadership to take a strong stand in support of faculty speaking up when they witness students making comments that are discriminatory, and to ensure all faculty are equipped with the pedagogical and instructional skills to best support an inclusive classroom experience for all students.

#### **Fall 2020 Action Steps**

1. ***Support for Faculty:*** Many of the stories shared by both current students and graduates named the hurtful impact of faculty silence in moments of both ignorant and intentional discrimination. We have an obligation as school leaders to make clear how strongly we support our faculty speaking up to intervene in those moments. While teachers may feel anxious about saying the wrong thing in a charged situation, we know that addressing discrimination in the moment is far better than remaining silent. We need to make clear our forgiveness for mistakes, and our stronger interest in adults speaking up in these moments. We also have a clear need to provide our faculty with the tools and resources to feel more equipped and empowered to manage these conversations.
2. ***Professional Development Requirement:*** Beginning this fall, we will implement a DEI professional development requirement for faculty and staff. Academic and DEI leaders are working to establish the parameters of this requirement to move us forward in the right ways.
  - We need to ensure we can provide sufficient opportunities, support, and access to impactful professional development experiences.
  - We need to be able to differentiate between the kinds of professional experiences, such as the difference between a one-hour workshop and a multi-day conference, in what we expect.
  - We need to establish systems to follow up on the requirement and to foster the important conversations that need to happen after the experience.

3. **All Faculty/Staff Training:** We will be using our dedicated on campus professional development days this year for furthering our DEI work.
  - **Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO):** We completed 2/3 of our planned faculty and staff sessions with FHAO last year. We plan to continue that work next fall, and to broaden the work to include our students.
  - **Implicit Bias Training:** Based on what we are hearing from our students and graduates, implicit bias training seems to be the most pressing need we have as a full faculty and staff. We are evaluating options to best deliver this training beginning next year, recognizing that implicit bias training, to be most impactful, requires a long-term commitment and investment of time and resources.
  - **Gender Identity:** We will hold continued training of the faculty and staff regarding gender identity, pronouns and a deeper understanding of queer and trans identities and how to advocate and support our LGBTQIAP+ students.
3. **White Anti-Racist Work:** Last year, we began gathering faculty and staff interested in participating in white anti-racist work. With the support of two Nobles faculty leaders and an outside facilitator, that work has continued this summer. We plan to continue to broaden and deepen this important effort this fall.

### Long-Term Work

1. **Onboarding:** We need to evaluate our orientation and onboarding for all new faculty and staff, focusing on the principles, expectations, and training we establish at the outset of their employment at Nobles around DEI.
  2. **Professional Development Programming:** We need to deepen our long-term programming around professional development to create a sustainable, enduring system for growth in this area. We need to be inclusive of all marginalized identities as we plan professional development, including but not limited to the experiences of our Queer and Trans Black and Indigenous People of Color (QTBIPOC) students. This means learning about and understanding the experiences and trauma of our Black and Brown students not just through the lens of race but through other lenses of their identity as well.
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## Theme 3

### **Support for Students of Color**

Students of color have expressed concern for the lack of diversity among adults they can seek for counseling support at Nobles. In addition, they long to see more faculty of color in our classrooms and in visible leadership positions—faculty who can serve as mirrors for our students of color. It is important that we continually recognize the intersectionality of our students’ multiple marginalized identities as we seek to deepen student support.

#### **Fall 2020 Action Steps**

1. ***Additional Counseling Support:*** We will be adding staff this fall to our Counseling and Psychological Services Department to support our students of color. The department will focus on identifying those members of our community who may feel marginalized in their access to counseling support, and will establish programming that provides broader outreach and inclusion.
2. ***Additional Counseling Programming:*** There are two additional counseling programs being launched this fall:
  - ***The Body Positive:*** This fall, we will launch “[The Body Positive](#),” a program focused on body acceptance, recognition of bias and discrimination around body images, and affirming differences across body size, gender, race, appearance, etc. The faculty leading this program have been trained to lead these impactful workshops. In its pilot phase this fall, it will be an optional program open to all Nobles students.
  - ***Class I Workshops:*** We will be offering a four-part workshop series for seniors this year, led by [Dr. Stephanie Pinder-Amaker](#), Director of College Mental Health at McLean Hospital. Dr. Pinder-Amaker’s work is focused on helping students think about their mental health in the context of their social/cultural identities, understanding themselves across identities, and using a strength-based approach to destigmatize mental health access and to boost necessary skills and tools for wellbeing.
3. ***Student Affinity Groups:*** As our student affinity groups have grown in size and scope, the need to branch out and add additional affinity groups to meet more specific needs within the larger groups became clear. In addition to the 6 affinity groups we had already established, we have added the following affinity groups for this fall: Black Students Union, Poder (LatinX student group), Middle Eastern, South Asian, East and SE Asia/Pacific Islander group, and a Multiracial student group.
4. ***DEI Student Advisory Board:*** Last spring, the DEI Department established a DEI student advisory board, a group of 8 student leaders who will partner with the DEI Department in programming and support for our community.

5. **Reviewing Our Calendar:** Based on the feedback we have heard over the last few years, the holidays and holy days recognized by the school do not feel appropriately inclusive or responsive to our community's demographic and needs. This fall, we will conduct a process to review our school calendar to evaluate opportunities for change. While we will be unable to meet every single community member's wishes, we are hopeful that our efforts to listen and respond will improve our efforts towards a more inclusive school calendar.

We plan to make one change that feels necessary and obvious this fall. What has traditionally been called "Columbus Day" on our school calendar, a label that incorrectly supports the notion that Columbus discovered America, and that also ignores the tremendous injustices brought against Indigenous People over centuries, will be changed on Nobles' calendar immediately to "Indigenous People's Day."

### Long Term Work

1. **Hiring:** Many students and graduates in recent weeks have commented on our need for greater diversity in our hiring. We began a process last year to audit and interrogate our hiring practices and faculty attrition as well as opportunities to think outside the box in addressing this challenge. Some current statistics:
  - We will have 25% faculty of color this coming school year.
  - Over the last 5 years, we have hired 40% faculty of color
2. **Leadership and Mentoring:** We recognize a need to deepen our mentoring and support of our faculty of color. We need to improve retention of faculty of color, ensure we are providing the necessary investments to provide broader leadership opportunities, and evaluate how leadership positions are filled.

While we have made some progress with our senior administrative team, which currently consists of 5/17 members who identify as people of color, we have steeper challenges in academic leadership at Nobles. Currently, every academic department chair identifies as white. This is, at least in part, tied to the ways in which we have historically filled these positions. Department chairs are traditionally given to a current faculty member (rather than hiring from outside), and they are almost always given to a highly tenured faculty member. We will be interrogating this process of leadership access and support, with the goal of broadening both.

3. **Advisory:** We began a comprehensive review of advisory over a year ago. Current and former students of color have underscored the critical role the advisor can play in their journey through Nobles. We are making some substantive structural changes to how advisory groups are selected, as well as how the programming is established for this fall. We also need to study ways to rethink advisory in terms of schedule, curriculum, and personnel.
4. **Reviewing What is on Our Walls:** Last winter, we created a task force led by Jennifer Hines to study what is on our walls throughout campus. While we have no knowledge of offensive images on our walls that need to be removed, we do need to move around and add art and

artifacts to our walls in ways that better align with our history and mission, and that provide mirrors for our current students. A group has been assembled that includes representatives from diverse areas of the school to evaluate our walls through the prism of mission, DEI, aesthetic, admissions, and student experience. While their work was halted this spring with the pandemic, they will reignite their work again this fall to study and recommend some short and long-term changes.

5. ***Isolation in Scheduling:*** We have heard from current students and graduates that they are sometimes the only, or one of very few, students of color in a particular class, an experience that they describe as acutely isolating and difficult. We need to study our options within our scheduling process to avoid this occurring whenever possible.
6. ***Access to Higher Level Courses:*** There is concern that there are hidden barriers to access to our higher level courses for some students. We will conduct an analysis of our enrollment data in higher level courses as well as review for any implicit or explicit bias in students' access to these courses.

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## **Theme 4**

### **Curricular Needs and Opportunities**

Students have expressed concern that our core curriculum lacks sufficient diversity of texts and content, and that access to a more diverse curriculum is too limited to electives and optional programs.

#### **Fall 2020 Action Steps**

1. ***Establish Curricular Principles:*** Through a process that includes diverse voices and perspectives, we will be creating a document that articulates the DEI prism through which we interrogate our curriculum at Nobles across all departments. This will be created this fall.
2. ***Curricular Review:*** Using the DEI prism document, all departments will be conducting a review of their curriculum over the following months that results in an articulation of what we are doing towards this work and where there is needed change. This review work will also be conducted in EXCEL, afternoon program, and all other program areas.

#### **Long-Term Work**

1. ***Instructional Planning:*** The review of curriculum will also identify the equally important questions of *how we teach what we are teaching*, which will be addressed in our professional development program (see above).

2. ***System of Review:*** We plan to emerge from this process with a commitment to a system of curricular review through our agreed upon DEI prism, with the assumption that our program should continually evolve over time.

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## **Theme 5**

### **Student Demographics**

While the percentage of students of color at Nobles has notably grown in the last 15 years, there continues to be a sense among our students and graduates of color that we have not made sufficient demographic strides within our Black and Latinx populations in particular, and that the makeup of our multiracial population is unclear.

Below is a snapshot of our demographics currently compared to 2007-08.

	<b>2007-08</b>	<b>2020-21</b>
<b>African American</b>	7.3%	9.3%
<b>Asian American</b>	6.4%	15.5%
<b>Multiracial</b>	2.8%	9.0%
<b>Latino</b>	5.1%	4.6%
<b>Middle Eastern</b>	1.4%	1.6%
<b>Native American</b>	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	23.0%	39.9%

### **Fall 2020 Action Steps**

1. ***Evaluate How Diversity Statistics are Gathered:*** We will consider other, more detailed ways to gather diversity statistics that provide a more specific picture of our demographics.
2. ***Establish Clarity of Diversity at Nobles:*** After deciding upon a new set of racial/ethnic categories, one that more accurately tells the story of our demographics, we will need to find a way to gather this information from our current student population to gain a clear picture of our existing student diversity.
3. ***Evaluate Diversity Challenges:*** Once the data is clearer and more detailed, we will conduct an analysis of where the challenges to greater diversity within the Black and Latinx populations in particular exist. We will seek to hone in on where the obstacles have been for us in increasing these areas of student diversity.
4. ***Communicate the Data:*** There is a clear need for us to more effectively communicate to all of our constituencies our current student demographic once it is more detailed, and to share

very openly where we have grown and where we have struggled with respect to student diversity.

### **Long-Term Work**

1. ***Diversity as Experienced by Students:*** As we better clarify our diversity statistics, we need to study what these numbers mean in the daily experiences of our students of color at Nobles, both during the school day and socially. How do our students experience diversity in their individual classes, on teams, in gathering spaces on campus, and outside of school? The answers to these questions should help to inform our strategic priorities.
2. ***Strategic Diversity Goals:*** Based on what is learned in the short term about our current student demographics and areas of challenge, we need to establish strategic goals around student diversity for the long term, which will include any needed changes to our outreach efforts, admissions processes, and other key strategic areas that emerge during the audit. These diversity goals need to be directly tied to our goals around equity and inclusion.