

Washington Academy Equity Audit Findings

Audit conducted December 2020-March 2021

Initial Findings Submitted April 5, 2021

Formal Report Submitted April 24, 2021

Presentation to WA Leadership May 10, 2021

Presentation to WA Board of Trustees May 20, 2021

Public Release of this Report Schedule for May 24, 2021

Executive Summary:

Washington Academy contacted Carney Sandoe & Associates because their school was in need of an equity audit to assess the state of belonging and inclusion in their school community. Lawrence Alexander and Seliat Dairo conducted an equity audit that consisted of the following tools:

1. Community Professional Education for Employees and Students regarding implicit bias and community inclusion.
2. A community belonging survey administered to WA students.
3. A series of focus group meetings with WA faculty and staff.

Based on these three survey tools, we have discovered the following community themes:

1. A need for community education so that employees and students can skillfully enter into critical conversations about difference. There seems to be a low sense of community confidence in this area.
2. A need for more diversity amongst the WA employee community. There is more racial and ethnic diversity amongst the students than the faculty and staff. WA students lack the “cultural windows” they need to see themselves in the employee community.
3. A need to more meaningfully engage the Washington County community in cultural education. Students from diverse backgrounds at WA have reported not feeling safe and connected when they leave the WA campus to shop, eat, or explore.

Our survey tools helped us identify the following equity opportunities within the Washington Academy community:

1. The WA Board
 - a. Recruiting a more diverse board from a geographic, racial, and ethnic perspective. The board is currently comprised of many local community members and that composition does not reflect the student or family composition of the school. It can be a challenge to govern a school whose community a board does not reflect.
 - b. Setting board term limits. This can create the equity opportunities needed to diversify the WA board.
2. WA's Enrollment Management Process
 - a. Examining the relationship between students of color and financial aid. It would be helpful for WA to examine the relationship between international and domestic students of color and financial aid. There seems to be interpersonal conflicts between

Washington County students and community members, and full-pay international students, as well as community resentment of student-athletes of color on financial aid. This structural dynamic has created community tensions that are worth exploring.

3. WA's Teaching & Learning

- a. Conducting a curricular audit. Through our focus group meetings with faculty, they have expressed a desire to critically reflect on the current cultural inclusiveness of their own curriculum. Many faculty members also lack the ability to do that critical reflection themselves. A curriculum and pedagogical approach should consider every student's culture to be an inclusive approach.
- b. Professional Education for Faculty. Based on our focus group conversations with faculty and department chairs, WA would benefit from providing professional education for faculty and department chairs on a consistent basis on issues related to cultural competence, curricular inclusion, and progressive education to better serve their diverse student population. WA has a mostly local employee community, less diverse when compared to the student community. This mismatch between WA employees and students can be a disservice to WA students.

4. WA's Development & Communications

- a. Examine the cultural diversity of the WA alumni and development base. While this was not part of the audit, we encourage the WA Board and Head of School to audit their alumni and development base to see how culturally diverse their support base is. This area is usually closely connected to the current state of belonging and inclusion experienced by diverse students and families within the community.

5. WA's Hiring and Training

- a. Hire for more ethnic and cultural diversity. WA's employee community is not reflective of the student body and this has been a disservice to WA students. WA should audit their current hiring practices and explore more options for job posting sites, diverse placement agencies, and search firms when openings present themselves. A more diverse employee community can provide more cultural safety for WA's diverse student body.
- b. Consider hiring a Director of Equity and Belonging. WA does not currently have an employee who can provide leadership regarding issues related to equity and belonging. They may want to consider creating this role and hiring this person in the 2021-2022 school year.

6. WA's Community Life Program

- a. Create more Cultural and Affinity Groups for Students. In reviewing the community belonging survey from students it does not seem that diverse students at WA have dedicated spaces and groups where they can share their cultural identities and common interests. It would be wise for WA to create affinity groups and spaces for diverse students to connect in this way. It would also be helpful for white students at WA to have groups for allies where they can deepen their cultural competencies in order to become stronger allies.

Conclusion:

Washington Academy is comprised of a great group of really caring board members and employees and a culturally diverse student body. There are great community intentions to provide a safe, just, equitable and inclusive program for everyone. Washington Academy must lean into this moment to provide more professional education for their employees, diversify their employee base, raise the level of cultural education for their students, and deepen their cultural connection with the Washington County community. These things don't happen overnight but many of these steps can be taken right away. As Washington Academy leans into this work, they will be an even safer, more just, and more inclusive school community.

-End Report -

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