

# **Executive Summary of the Diversity Collaborative Survey Results**

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## **Purpose**

During the spring of 2019, the Diversity Collaborative, a voluntary group of international educators initiated a research study by partnering with ISC Research and George Mason University. Our goal was to survey the field of accredited international schools to establish a baseline of information in the international school sector about school leadership and diversity. The study was distributed to approximately 2,676 accredited international schools.

## **Highlights**

Key findings from the data are:

- A. Definitions of diversity, equity and inclusion vary as well as recognition of the value of these attributes in an international school.
- B. Whatever their definition, international schools are more likely to be focused on students demonstrating these attributes than on faculty/leadership reflecting and modeling these attributes.
- C. Awareness of the importance and positive contribution of having a diverse leadership team is not always clear or valued.
- D. Intentionality followed by action/implementation across time makes a difference in the development of a diverse leadership team.
- E. Recruiting/hiring for a diverse leadership team as well as creating pathways within a school are not always easy, but such objectives are doable.
- F. Processes (e.g. policies, accreditation, strategic planning), followed by reflection and evaluation, support these efforts.
- G. There were demonstrable differences in self-efficacy and power. In some instances, facing pushback, respondents found a work-around and means to move issues forward; in other cases, they blamed 'others' (e.g. parents, Board, other teachers "won't let us.")
- H. Strong models of diversity, equity, and inclusion exist among the international schools that responded. School leaders have enormous power in schools; those who prioritized diversity, equity and inclusion were able to make a difference regardless of their contexts.

## **Summary of Responses**

### **Successes Achieved**

Among the survey respondents, there were some exemplary schools that have intentionally and strategically focused on issues around diversity, equity and inclusion. Those schools identified definitions used in their contexts and developed strategic plans for the recruitment, mentoring, development and retention of diverse leadership candidates. They had a clear purpose and specific examples of success to share.

### **Challenges Confronted**

In this category, respondents provided a range of challenges related to definitions, perceptions, pathways, Board/governance, local culture, and what is known in the literature as "minimization bias." Respondents reported struggling with definitions – "what are 'diversity, equity and inclusion' and more specifically what does it mean in my particular setting, school or country?"

Along with seeking clearer definitions was the sense that in some schools, the questions of diversity, equity, and inclusion had not been addressed, because they didn't know it should be, "We didn't know what we didn't know," so the importance and influence of having a diverse leadership team was underestimated.

### Stories & Reflections

This was the broadest category of responses represented in the survey. Examples were wide ranging from legal requirements by country ("we have a nondiscrimination policy in the handbook") to philosophical commitments ("we are a multi-ethnic international school - diversity is who we are"). A few respondents stressed the importance of discussion and education: "While there is sensitivity to the issue, there is no effective forum for discussion which leads to action," and "There is much unconscious bias; a first step would be to educate." Consistently, respondents noted the presence of in-country legal requirements, school policies and strategic plans that focused on non-discrimination practices, however, they also commented that non-discrimination policies alone are insufficient to move a school forward.

### Implications

Based upon the survey data and by merging two established frameworks for diversity: the *Intercultural Development Continuum* (IDC™) and *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice* (DEI-J), we developed a related *Integrated Organizational Framework* to help international schools and organizations serving international schools become more intercultural, equitable and just (see Figure 1). This framework reflects the stages that were articulated by the DCS participants to all three qualitative prompts and may help schools diagnose the challenges they face and move forward given their specific contexts. Just as the journey up the IDC is often not linear, so too, international schools may find themselves at different points of the Integrated Organizational Framework, depending on the particular DEI-J issue (e.g. student inclusion, senior leadership diversity, local staff engagement) they are addressing, and they may move back and forth among the stages as situations arise, contexts evolve, or leadership changes. Nevertheless, the overall trajectory describes how many international school leaders who responded to the Diversity Collaborative Survey seemed to have moved from monocultural mindsets to more intercultural ones and developed more diverse leadership teams.

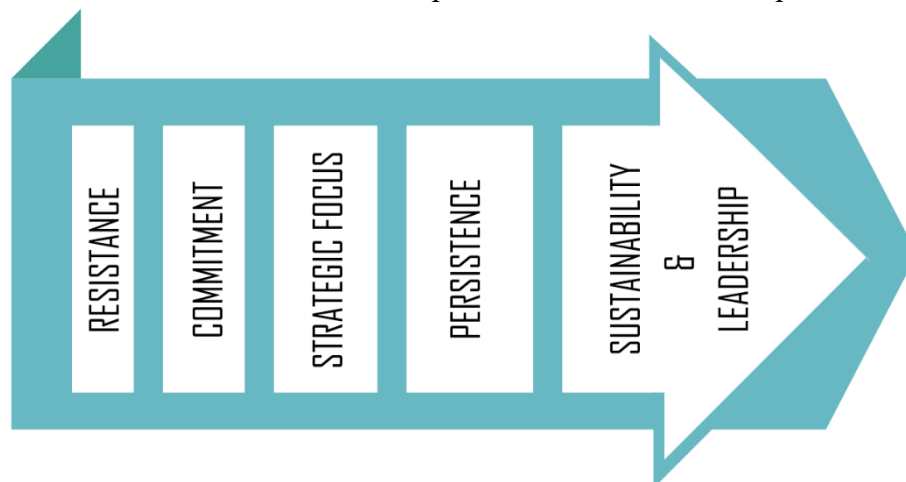


Figure 1. Integrated Organizational Framework for increasing diversity, equity, inclusion and justice in international schools.

- *Resistance* – Often international schools initially face resistance from some stakeholders to focusing on DEI-J issues and/or deliberately developing a diverse leadership team. It's important to understand the source of that resistance and to learn from other schools in similar contexts that have become more intercultural.
- *Commitment* – Once they've overcome resistance, an international school's stakeholders articulate a commitment to DEI-J and interculturalism that reflects their unique context.
- *Strategic Focus* – At this stage, international schools establish specific goals and long-term plans to ensure that their commitment to interculturalism and DEI-J practices become embedded in the school.
- *Persistence* – Even with the best laid plans, international schools inevitably hit barriers and challenges doing DEI-J/intercultural work. How a school's stakeholders respond to those challenges determines whether a school's DEI-J/intercultural commitment persists through the inevitable leadership, curricular and other transitions.
- *Sustainability/Leadership* – Schools with sustained commitments to DEI-J/intercultural issues leverage that commitment to attract students and educators and serve as role models, mentors and leaders in the international school community.

The Integrated Organizational Framework suggests how both individual international schools, supporting organizations and the international school sector as a whole can cultivate more diverse leadership and ultimately become more intercultural.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the DCS and using the Integrated Organizational Framework described above, we have developed a preliminary set of recommendations for schools and the international school community. It is hoped that by working concurrently at both the school level and the sector level, we will significantly increase the diversity of international school leadership, so the leadership teams of our schools better reflect the diversity of the students in our care and the world in which they will work and live. We posit too that having more diverse school leaders will ultimately increase the diversity, equity, inclusion and justice of international school communities for the students and families we serve.

### **School-Level Recommendations to Increase Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice in International Schools**

To address *Resistance*:

- Encourage key school constituents to attend local/regional trainings on diversity, equity, inclusion and justice.
- Connect with schools or other organizations in your city or region whose efforts in this area you admire to learn from their journeys.
- Articulate why having a diverse leadership team is important for your school.

To establish *Commitment*:

- Evaluate your leadership pipeline to understand the experience of different groups of educators at your school.
- Host courageous conversations about diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice among all your school stakeholders.
- Adapt and articulate definitions of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice that make sense in your context.



To develop a *Strategic Focus*:

- Include a focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in your strategic plan and/or reaccreditation self-study.
- Establish priorities and goals around your DEI-J efforts.
- Actively recruit/promote diverse teachers, teacher leaders and leadership team members.

To ensure *Persistence*:

- Celebrate your successes and expect and learn from your challenges and setbacks.
- Use a tool and associated training like the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to deepen your commitment and track your progress toward interculturalism.
- Share your journey through conference presentations/workshops.

To achieve *Sustainability/Leadership*:

- Use your DEI-J reputation to promote your school and recruit diverse educators.
- Help to lead the DEI-J efforts in your region and globally.
- Develop a case study or write a journal article about your DEI-J efforts to assist other schools.

### **Regional/Global Recommendations to Increase Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice in International Schools**

The international school sector can help schools on their journeys by prioritizing the following initiatives:

1. Develop international school definitions of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice that are not US or Eurocentric, because the issues in international schools are substantially different than in local US/European schools. Trying to transfer “diversity” from the US perspective around the world is likely to be unsuccessful.
2. Through global organizations, continue to gather data from international schools and associations to better inform the international school community about existing inequities and track progress over time.
3. Include sessions about diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice at international school conferences and in association-sponsored professional development programs for aspiring, new and experienced school leaders and board members.
4. Work with international school search firms and other consultants to educate boards and search committees about the value of diverse leadership teams and to connect to the growing networks of diverse international school educators.
5. Work with accreditation agencies to reinforce the value of diversity and encourage schools to include diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice goals in their school improvement plans.
6. Identify a “critical friends” group in each region with experience in DEI-J work. Create a series of traveling workshops for schools who are beginning this adventure. (Be sure to represent the broad definitions of diversity).
7. Identify a range of schools (e.g. by location, size, resources, etc.) and create case studies – How did they create more diverse leadership teams? How have they sustained it? What advice do they have for others?
8. To maintain momentum, share and promote all of the work above, through international school conference workshops, publications and social media.

## How to Get Involved

Diverse school leadership teams not only have the potential to make better and more innovative decisions, but they also provide effective role models for all students, ensure broader access to talent, and enhance professional learning. Much can be done to increase diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice at international schools, particularly with regard to the recruitment, mentoring and support of school leaders. Fortunately, there are many models of success and helpful frameworks to assist schools in all contexts become more intercultural in their approaches to leadership development. To effect the significant change envisioned, parallel efforts by supporting organizations, such as recruitment firms, reaccreditation agencies, regional associations and global organizations, are essential. Finally, sector-wide initiatives, such as the Diversity Collaborative, can reinforce, magnify and standardize best practices, ensuring that progress persists through the inevitable leadership transitions experienced by international schools.

We invite and encourage all interested school constituents to become part of this important transformation at whatever level feels most appropriate to you. For those interested in joining the Diversity Collaborative, please contact us at [infodiversitycollaborative@iss.edu](mailto:infodiversitycollaborative@iss.edu). For a full version of this report and supporting resources, please go to [iss.education/diversitycollab](http://iss.education/diversitycollab).

