
Uncommon Schools

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

AT UNCOMMON SCHOOLS



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At Uncommon Schools, we believe that Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are vital to our mission: providing our students with an outstanding education that prepares them to graduate from college. We believe that all students should have the opportunities and resources to think critically and thrive as individuals, and we recognize that developing diverse, equitable, and inclusive schools and offices is a critical step in supporting them to become their best and most authentic selves.

From our first 72 students in Newark in 1997 to our 21,000 students across six cities today, Uncommon has proudly worked to advance social justice through education. This document reflects our active commitment to ongoing introspection and growth as an organization and is grounded in the results of listening to and engaging with a diverse group of teammates from across regions, roles, and levels throughout the 20-21 year. We have summarized our vision for DEI at Uncommon, the definitions we will use to guide our decision-making and against which we will hold ourselves accountable, and our strategies and implementation timeline to create impactful change. Thank you to everyone who has participated in this journey with us. We look forward to continuing this work in the weeks, months, and years to come.



OUR DEI VISION

Over the course of our 24-year history, we have worked to continually strengthen DEI at Uncommon in support of our students' achievement, growth, and holistic well-being. DEI plays a significant role in both the experience of our students and the lives of our staff. Fostering diverse, equitable, and inclusive environments enables our students, staff and leaders to grow into their most passionate, committed, and authentic selves.

VISION

We are committed to supporting each student in learning and achieving at the highest levels. Therefore, we are committed to cultivating a diverse, inclusive community where all students and staff are actively learning to develop and be the best version of themselves. As an aspiring anti-racist community, we actively break down barriers to equity within our schools, offices and ourselves so that everyone's unique experiences, backgrounds and perspectives are seen, valued and heard. We cultivate these conditions while building our social-emotional capabilities as individuals and as an organization. When we have the vocabulary and safe space to elevate concerns, reflect on others' and our own needs and behaviors, and advocate for change, we create a community where we can take empathetic action and create an environment conducive to learning, growing, and thriving.

We are eager to embark on this upcoming journey and continue our ongoing introspection, and we remain committed to revisiting and reevaluating our DEI mission, vision, and goals as we evolve.



Timeline

The following timeline outlines key highlights along Uncommon's most recent ten year journey in committing ourselves to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- 2010**
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 - Began offering our **Summer Teaching Fellowship (STF)** to a diverse set of prospective candidates interested in becoming teachers at Uncommon
 - Over 80% of STFers are **young people of color** and over 80% receive a full time offer of employment
- 2012**
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 - Implemented **ongoing curricular revisions** to ensure diversity and representation
- 2014**
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 - 50+ STF alums** are full-time Uncommon teachers and staff
- 2015**
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 - Launched a central DEI team** to strengthen DEI for staff and students across all of our schools
- 2016**
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 - Incorporated **DEI into staff PDs** to ensure staff receive the essential tools needed to advance our mission
- 2017**
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 - Recorded that **over 50% of staff identified as people of color**
- 2018**
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 - Welcomed participants from our **2011 STF cohort into Principal roles** in Brooklyn
 - Launched **Lead From Within**, a leadership development program for leaders of color
 - Established **partnership with Morehouse College** to create pipeline of Black male leaders and teachers
- 2019**
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 - 46 Uncommon alums** are full-time Uncommon employees
- 2020**
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 - Implemented **culturally responsive teaching pedagogies** in all classrooms
 - Began working with **Promise54** to outline a multi-year DEI plan
- 2021**
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 - 60% of Uncommon Staff** are people of color
 - Five Morehouse alums** are leading our schools
 - Close to **200 STF alumni** are full-time Uncommon teachers and staff

DEFINITIONS

A critical part of developing our long-term plan involved clarifying the definitions of diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-racism and opportunity gap within the context of Uncommon. These definitions will enable us to take more targeted actions and hold ourselves accountable to ensure we create the conditions we set out to develop at the onset of this work.



DIVERSITY

Diversity is honoring the presence of different types of people with differences in perspectives, work and life experiences, as well as religious and cultural differences.

It includes but is not limited to race, color, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, veteran status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, gender expression, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, genetic information, and learning styles.

The impact and power of diversity can only be experienced when we recognize these differences and respect and value each individual.



EQUITY

Equity identifies, eliminates barriers, and provides supports to historically marginalized groups. We continue to assess our systems and norms as well as provide access, opportunity, and advancement to work towards equitable outcomes.



INCLUSION

Inclusion is diversity in its fully realized form. It means we are a community of individuals – students, educators, staff, and families – working together to build an environment that values every voice, no matter their background, age, identity, or experience. We are stronger and more effective in our mission when we strive to bring our authentic and best selves and hold ourselves responsible to being an intentional community when we come together.

ANTI-RACISM



Anti-racism is the active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies, practices, and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably. Being antiracist results from a conscious decision to make frequent, consistent, equitable choices daily - these choices require ongoing self-awareness and self-reflection.

OPPORTUNITY GAP



Opportunity gap recognizes a chronic lack of resources that leads directly to diminished opportunities for learning. It refers to the conditions and obstacles that young students face throughout their educational careers and places responsibility on an inequitable system that is not providing the opportunities for all children to thrive and succeed.

DEI IN OUR CLASSROOMS

One of the primary ways in which Uncommon has already begun implementing DEI strategies in the classroom in the 20-21 school year is through the use of Zaretta Hammond's framework on culturally responsive teaching. Broader than a single teaching style or technique, culturally responsive teaching is an educational approach that recognizes students' diverse experiences, references, knowledge, and ways of thinking or expressing themselves. Bringing together the strength of Uncommon's instructional design and how our staff and teachers build relationships with students, we are training teachers and staff to be aware of moments when they may be letting their own personal context interfere with how they explain new information or react to a situation. We are leveraging individual students' cultural references when responding to students' behavior or helping them connect to the curriculum. We also celebrate our individual students and support them in their journey towards a better understanding of who they are while equipping them with the tools to be their authentic, best selves. Recognizing and teaching to students' diverse strengths and backgrounds ensures that all students become critical thinkers and feel like important members of the classroom community.

At the beginning of the 20-21 year, Uncommon started to implement this philosophy with four key components of our instructional and operational model. We continue to improve and implement these practices:

- **DEI Training and Learning**

Our staff and leaders continue to receive DEI training sessions multiple times a year on culturally responsive teaching and on growing into their own understanding of themselves and the work we do through a DEI lens. Our students also have specific, age-appropriate lessons around self-identity and DEI. In particular, our high school students are developing content expertise in DEI and leading discussions around challenging DEI texts and topics with their peers.

- **Curriculum**

We continue to conduct in-depth reviews of our curriculum to ensure it reflects the diversity, cultures, and identities of our students. We are utilizing our open feedback process to continually improve and expand our curriculum, especially the books and texts we read, to better support our students.



- **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)**

We have also brought together thoughtful design and strategies to increase emotional resilience and build social-emotional learning into our curriculum, instructional practices, and with our staff. Whether it is in whole school moments, staff meetings, or individual moments with students, we are incorporating skills around self- and social awareness, empathy, and perspective-taking abilities. Our intention is to foster a healthy emotional climate so our staff and students can thrive.

- **Staff and School Culture**

We continue to incorporate SEL and DEI practices to better support our staff and students. We adjusted our language, systems, processes, and policies to create conditions that enable stronger student-teacher relationships and encourage more equitable learning outcomes.

We are excited by the progress we have made this year, and continue to strive to be a better and better listening community. We look forward to continuing to adapt our practices to create DEI-enabled environments that set up our staff and students for success.

OUR MULTI-YEAR DEI PLAN

As we continue to evolve and build upon the new initiatives implemented in 20-21, we are also looking forward to prioritizing a variety of initiatives to strengthen diversity, equity and inclusion across our organization. As such, in order to achieve our DEI vision, we have outlined four pillars for creating and maintaining these conditions within our schools and offices. The table below outlines the sequence for our high-level strategies to support these pillars.

DEI STRATEGY

In order to meaningfully undertake any DEI strategies and initiatives, we must build the internal capacity to assess, monitor, and sustain our DEI efforts across the organization. This includes setting goals, metrics, and frameworks to hold ourselves accountable for making progress and for making equitable decisions along the way.

BROADENING DIVERSITY





We are proud to have a racially and ethnically diverse workplace, with 60% of our staff identifying as people of color. At the same time, we have an opportunity to broaden our organizational understanding of diversity to include gender identity, sexual orientation, ability/disability, and other forms of diversity. We will also recommit ourselves to ensuring we have an increasingly diverse team of school, regional, and office leaders.

INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Creating the cultural conditions for trust are a high priority for our organization. We recognize the need for cultural shifts and deepened investments in not only having a diverse workforce, but also ensuring that these diverse perspectives feel included and heard within an anti-racist context. We are committed to developing manager and staff trainings that address the elements of inclusive cultures, and we have already begun developing and sharing a social-emotional learning curriculum with students, staff, and families to assist in creating this culture.

OPERATIONALIZING EQUITY

As with constructing an inclusive organizational culture, developing equitable processes will be a key area of focus during the coming years. In particular, we are committed to building increasingly transparent processes for our staff, which will include clear information about career advancement, performance management, compensation, and work sustainability.

PILLARS	2021-2022	2022-2024
 DEI STRATEGY Strengthen internal capacity to assess, monitor progress, and sustain DEI efforts across the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish DEI structure & supports to align future strategic priorities Develop a DEI framework to guide inclusive org-wide decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop & implement an equity framework for ongoing audit policies, structures & systems
 BROADENING DIVERSITY Expand diversity across the network by deepening our organizational understanding of diversity and increasing leadership diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand our understanding of diversity in our professional development for staff & students, in our human resources language and policy, and in the metrics we track Evaluate & improve recruitment & hiring practices Recruit & retain an expanded pipeline of leaders of color 	
 INCLUSIVE ORG. CULTURE Creating cultural conditions for increased trust and deepened investment in becoming a more inclusive, anti-racist organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop & train managers and all staff in social-emotional & DEI knowledge and skills Continue and improve our listening culture (e.g., surveys, curriculum feedback loop) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update and implement SEL and DEI learnings/tools into our school and staff systems and structures (e.g., arrival, discipline, staff meetings) Create DEI & SEL tools to promote best self Launch mental health service for our HS students
 OPERATIONALIZING EQUITY Building centralized, equitable and transparent processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an equitable compensation strategy Refresh performance management system, including competency models Develop, refine & share equity-driven, competency-based career pathways Establish supports for better work/life balance 	

CONCLUSION

As educators and as an organization, we are committed to continuously learning, growing, and evolving in our practices and our philosophy. DEI has been and will continue to be integral to our work. Prioritizing the cultivation of diverse, equitable, and inclusive conditions benefits our entire community, and it is a fundamental part of supporting our students and our staff in becoming their best selves. We are eager to begin this next phase of our DEI journey, and we thank everyone who has helped us get to this point today. We look forward to your continued partnership in the months and years to come.

