



DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ANTI-RACISM DEFINITIONS AND COMMITMENT STATEMENT

ASCEND'S DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ANTI-RACISM DEFINITIONS

DIVERSITY encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. Diversity is not a quota. It recognizes everyone and every group as part of the diversity that should be valued. A broad definition includes not only race, ethnicity, and gender — the groups that most often come to mind when the term "diversity" is used — but also age, national origin, immigration status, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance among other things. It also involves diversity of thought, ideas, perspectives, and values.ⁱ

EQUITY is fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for every individual, while at the same time identifying and eliminating barriers that prevent the full participation of some groups. An equitable organization has just procedures and processes and is fair in its distribution of resources. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society.ⁱⁱ

INCLUSION is the action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure. More than simply diversity and numerical representation, inclusion involves an organizational culture, modeled by leadership, that enables authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging. Inclusion is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can participate fully and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people.ⁱⁱⁱ

ANTI-RACISM: An anti-racist, multi-cultural organization seeks to identify, acknowledge, and disrupt systems and structures that perpetrate and perpetuate racism and inequity. It views racial and cultural differences as assets rather than deficits. Becoming an anti-racist organization requires an intentional, proactive commitment to:

- a future vision of the institution and wider community overcoming systemic racism and all other forms of oppression,
- the institution's life reflecting full participation and shared power with diverse racial, cultural, and economic groups in determining its mission, structure, constituency, policies and practices,
- ensuring that members across all identity groups participate fully in decisions that shape the institution, and that those decisions reflect diverse cultures, lifestyles, and interests,
- restoring community and creating an environment of mutual caring,
- allying with others in combating all forms of social oppression within and outside of the organization.^{iv}

FRAMING LANGUAGE

ASCEND'S MISSION is to equip every student with the knowledge, confidence, and character to succeed in college and beyond. While we are deeply committed to this mission, we recognize that within the education system as a whole and our own organization, many of our systems and structures, even when well-intentioned, serve to perpetuate white supremacist culture.^v We recognize our participation in oppressive systems and, as the result of thoughtful reflection, we fully commit to becoming a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist organization.

ASCEND'S COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ANTI-RACISM

ASCEND CHARTER SCHOOLS is intentionally situated in Brooklyn, New York. Our students, families, teachers, and staff are united in the mission of equipping students with the knowledge, confidence, and character they need to succeed in college and beyond. A focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism (DEIA) is essential to achieving this mission and we seek to represent this commitment in all that we do.

We believe our staff members must be windows and mirrors for our students, reflecting both those who share our students' backgrounds as well as individuals who have different life experiences. Regardless of background, our commitment is that every member of our team is aligned on the necessity and urgency of this work so that we are well positioned to provide students with rich, thoughtful, and rigorous learning experiences that honor, reflect, and celebrate all of our identities, develop agency, and foster independent thinking so that they can thrive on their own and engage the world as informed, responsible citizens. We serve all students within our community, regardless of need, and are committed to their academic success and social-emotional development.

We know that we are most effective in our mission when we foster collaboration within our community. We seek to break down silos within the organization to tap into diverse viewpoints, navigate challenges, and support transparency. Through communication and collaboration, we meaningfully engage students and families so that our choices are informed by a deep understanding of their experiences and perspectives.

We understand that our commitment to DEIA is forever-work and will require continuous growth and development. To support this growth, we are intentionally engaging in a collective learning journey, providing staff members with the training, skills, and resources they need to bring Ascend's DEIA commitment to life. Even though we all have different backgrounds and starting points, we challenge ourselves and one another to wrestle with the complexity of this work and embrace discomfort. This journey requires that we extend one another patience and grace.

We interrogate our systems and structures both within and outside of the classroom to ensure that they are equitable, inclusive, and just. We also seek to proactively disrupt the oppressive systems and structures that have historically underserved our students and families. We hold ourselves and each other accountable to be upstanders and not bystanders in our commitment to serving our students.

OUR WORK to become a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist organization is ongoing, but we will know Ascend is making progress when:

- diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism are integrated into all that we do, and we have clear measurement and accountability systems and dedicated resources to further this work;
- all students, families, teachers, and staff feel a sense of community and are valued, safe, supported, and welcomed;
- students are held to high expectations that balance accountability, respect, and love;
- the team is actively building DEIA mindsets and skills that enable them to serve and support students at the highest level and create spaces that enable students to bravely advocate for themselves;
- there is transparent and consistent communication and action; and
- all systems, processes, and policies are free of bias and reflect the diverse beliefs, voices, and experiences of the Ascend community.

As members of the Ascend team, our teachers and staff commit to this important work so that we are best positioned to achieve our mission, disrupt and dismantle systems of oppression that impact our families, and serve as agents for radical change to create better outcomes for our students.

As an Ascend staff member, I commit to the work of embodying Ascend’s commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism as my own.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

ENDNOTES

ⁱ [Adapted from UC Berkeley Center for Equity, Inclusion and Diversity, Glossary of Terms included in Racial Equity Tools Glossary of Terms](#)

ⁱⁱ Independent Sector definition derived from the D5 Coalition, Racial Equity Tools Glossary, and UC Berkeley

ⁱⁱⁱ Adapted from The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Racial Equity and Inclusion Action Guide and Independent Sector definition derived from the D5 Coalition, Racial Equity Tools Glossary, and UC Berkeley

^{iv} [Adapted from Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization, © Crossroads Ministry, Chicago, IL: Adapted from original concept by Bailey Jackson and Rita Hardiman, and further developed by Andrea Avazian and Ronice Branding; further adapted by Melia LaCour, PSESD.](#)

^v White supremacist culture refers to a set of characteristics (e.g., perfectionism, fear of open conflict, individualism) that are often unconsciously used by organizations as their norms and standards. The force of these characteristics is so strong that they make it difficult, if not impossible, to open the door to other cultural norms and standards. As a result, organizations, while saying we want to be multicultural, really only allow other people and cultures to come in if they adapt or conform to existing cultural norms. (Excerpted from *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups*, by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, ChangeWork, 2001)