



CHILDREN'S DAY SCHOOL

SPARKING CHANGE

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION NEWSLETTER

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From Awareness to Action

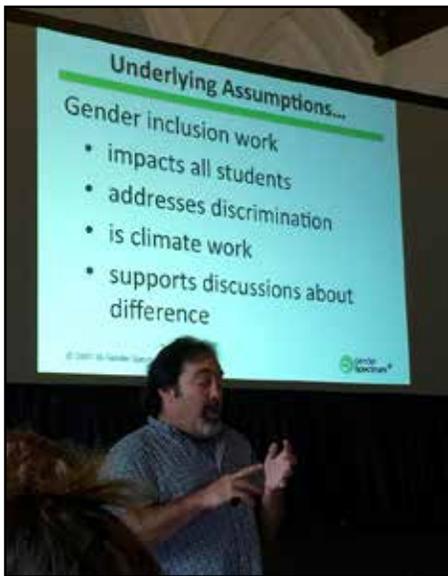
AT CDS, WE FEEL THAT IT'S CRITICAL not only for our students but also for our faculty and administrators to learn about and engage in social justice topics. Along these lines, we'd like to share some snapshots and milestones in the development of our faculty's teaching philosophy.

In October, our faculty and staff attended a presentation by Gender Spectrum, a Bay Area nonprofit that provides resources to help youth, families, educators, and organizations

to increase understanding and address concepts of gender identity and gender expression. Based on their recommendations, we are already working to reduce gender-binary language in our communications, and we have added gender-neutral options to our applications and event registration forms. We are also developing gender-inclusive language and lessons

throughout the school in grade- and age-appropriate ways, and we are in conversation about how to make bathrooms safe spaces for all students and adults.

Our teachers also plan to start working with a set of educational guidelines crafted by Teaching Tolerance, a division of the Southern Poverty Law Center that provides materials and suggestions for schools to create a safe environment for students and develop a multicultural curriculum. Their ideology is summed up in their Anti-Bias Framework, which we believe is an important structure for us to adopt. It provides a set of goals for students across all grade levels to learn about identity, diversity, and social justice, as well as the actions they can take to help create a more equitable society.



Joel Baum of Gender Spectrum was a guest speaker at the CDS Professional Development Day in October.

In November, our Early Childhood Program Director Antonette Greene brought several of her department members to the annual conference held by the NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children). The speakers included anti-bias editor and author Louise Derman-Sparks, who designed some of the teaching methods employed in our classrooms; Evelyn Moore of the National Black Child Development Institute; and Robin Fox and Erica Schepp of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, who discussed gender identity in early childhood. The conference was a valuable experience for all our representatives, and we look forward to implementing the ideas discussed there. ■

CDS Teachers Attend National PoCC Conference

Last month, CDS educators Alex Miller, Lori Roberts, Becky Sawada, Anthony Witte, and Chris Wachter attended the NAIS People of Color Conference (PoCC), held this year in Atlanta. Each year, a group of CDS teachers and administrators hear keynote speeches, engage in workshops, and participate in affinity group sessions. Beyond the scheduled programs, the informal conversations with colleagues make this event even more special.



A panel of speakers at the recent POCIS Conference in Atlanta included Christine King Farris, the sister of Martin Luther King, Jr.; Civil Rights leader and Congressman John Lewis (D-Ga.); Hank Aaron, former major league baseball player and Hall of Famer; and Caroline Blackwell, NAIS Vice President for Equity and Justice.

Social Justice Work at CDS

A snapshot of teaching methods across our curricular programs.

CDS aims to apply its values of diversity and inclusion throughout the whole school, from the children's earliest years to their graduation. To get a more detailed sense of our school's diversity work, we interviewed teachers across all grade levels and asked them how they integrate social justice concepts into the classroom. Here's what they told us:

Lower School – Kindergarten

Even among our youngest students, it's possible to hold thought-provoking dialogues about equity, inclusion, and societal stereotypes. "A lot of the social justice work that we do involves the concept of fairness," says Kindergarten Redwoods teacher **Lesley Chapman**. "Young kids are very attuned to that."

Lesley uses the books in her classroom library as an opportunity to open up discussions; for example, one story that lacked any female characters prompted the students to write a letter to the writer and publisher asking them to provide more positive representation. In other books, they might talk about how characters are portrayed and whether they fall into stereotypes.

Lesley praises the CDS administration for celebrating institutional diversity, and also admires the parents for supporting the school's mission. She found the recent Gender Spectrum presentation (see *cover story*) especially important. "It showed us that the school's on board with the type of teaching I know we all want to do," she says. ■



Kindergarten teacher Lesley Chapman with a student from the Redwoods class



Fourth grade teacher Becky Sawada during a lesson

Lower School – Fourth Grade

"In any community, there should always be reflection and analysis and goals," says Fourth Grade Marbled Murrelets teacher **Becky Sawada**, "and that's the case here." She integrates social justice concepts into a wide variety of academic subjects, ranging from a critical view of Christopher Columbus to a study of historical and modern Native American cultures to a discussion of the differences between wants and needs. Both this year's theme of Activism and last year's theme of Courage have inspired projects, such as an examination of the ongoing protests against a major berry company which has been accused of treating its farm workers unfairly.

Like Lesley, Becky praises CDS for its focus on inclusion. "Diversity is really fundamental to any healthy organization and community," she says. "What's important is that we all take it seriously; we're all willing to do the work that needs to be done." ■

Middle School Humanities

Fifth & Sixth Grade Humanities teacher **Art Oloresisimo** is one of the newest members of the CDS staff, having joined the team this fall. He is already impressed by the opportunities he has to engage in social justice work in the classroom. He describes CDS as "the perfect atmosphere" to discuss these issues, praising the school for "giving me the green light to speak my mind" on the subject of social justice.

In discussing history with his students, Art often points out the fact that the winners of wars are those who get to dictate the narrative, while marginalized voices are more likely to be silenced. "One of the lenses I use when talking about different types of people is the oppressor and the oppressed," Art says. "I'm always trying to find those voices that haven't been heard." His course on colonial America includes lessons on the varying cultures of Native American tribes (pushing back against the stereotype of a homogenous group of noble savages) and features the achievements of early social activists such as Bartolome de las Casas and Anne Hutchinson. ■



Middle School humanities teacher Art Oloresisimo with his fifth grade class



Middle School science teacher Kirk Bell explores global issues with his students

Middle School Science

Humanities classes are not the only opportunity for our middle school students to investigate social issues. "I'm always weaving environmental justice and social justice together," says veteran Fifth & Sixth Grade Science teacher **Kirk Bell**. A perfect example is the subject of natural disasters: beyond the scientific basis of these events, it's also important to examine their real-world impact. "It's often the poorest, most disenfranchised people who suffer the worst," Kirk says, pointing out that they are least likely to have the resources to leave dangerous areas and that charity money frequently fails to reach those who need it the most.

One of the most prominent features in Kirk's classroom is a wall filled with pictures of famous scientists, many of whom are from marginalized groups. "I try to focus on scientists who have faced adversity in their lives or have faced substantial discrimination for having their views accepted," he says. George Washington Carver, Alan Turing, Rachel Carson, Sally Ride, Neil deGrasse Tyson, early AIDS researcher Bruce Voeller, environmental activist Wangari Maathai (whose autobiography *Unbowed* was part of this year's One School One Book program), and many others are on display. He has also dedicated table names to these scientists, inspiring students to learn more about them. With our focus on activism, we encourage everyone in the CDS community to celebrate people fighting for social justice and to find ways we can advance this work. ■

Play it Forward

CDS' social justice efforts aren't limited to core classrooms; our specialist teachers integrate them into the curriculum as well.

CDS' Physical Education teachers—**Diana Bennett, Lori Roberts, Rhonda Ross, and Molly Whittaker**—take inspiration from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which sets out the basic freedoms that adults must grant to children. The thirty-first article of this treaty states that children have the right to play and rest, and the PE faculty has opened a variety of dialogues centered on this concept.

In the Lower School, Diana and Rhonda encourage their students to think about why playing is identified as a basic human right and how it may be important and beneficial. As a group, they discuss how playing helps kids live a healthy lifestyle, socialize, and have fun. They also talk about the ways in which playing promotes tolerance and respect for differences among people, especially when games involve sharing and teamwork.

Diana and Rhonda also frequently discuss the geography of playing. Their students study a map of San Francisco and consider how much access other children have to green areas and playing spaces. They also look at photographs of games from all over the world. Seeing children of diverse backgrounds playing with a variety of equipment in unique settings stimulates a lot of conversation, especially about the barriers that might make play difficult for some children.

Lori and Molly use similar strategies in their Middle School classes, with perhaps the most memorable moment being an activity called "Create Your Own Game." They talk with students about playing conditions in other areas, with subjects ranging from safety to different types of recreation areas to the availability or unavailability of supplies and other resources. Next, they challenge their students to think of original ideas for games, relying more on imagination than equipment. While limited supplies may make the process difficult at first, the students always have a fun time, and they gain a deeper understanding of the nature of play. ■



Our students take part in many different types of games and activities, as shown above

African-American/Black Family Picnic

A few CDS parents have begun their own diversity-related initiatives. **Nicolas King** (father of kindergartener Seiji and fourth grader Ellison) and **Rachel Williams** (mother of second grader Lila and fourth grader Charlotte) recently organized a potluck on the CDS yard for families of African descent from CDS and other Bay Area independent schools. Recognizing that relatively few students of African heritage attend independent schools in the region, they hoped to bring as many families as possible together to form a greater sense of community. Nicolas tells us that he admires CDS' social justice philosophy (including sliding scale tuition and diversity admission goals) as well as our affinity groups, and he hopes to set up further gatherings in the near future. ■



Enjoying the African-American/Black Family picnic

Our Diversity Partnerships

In 2016, CDS partnered with **Aim High**, an organization that supports summer learning for low-income middle school students. The 601 Dolores campus served as the Mission District site for their program. It was a successful project for both parties, and we look forward to working more with Aim High in the future.

CDS has been active in the Bay Area chapter of **POCIS (People of Color in Independent Schools)** for a number of years, and in November we hosted an Equity Roundtable which brought together diversity practitioners to discuss issues facing independent schools today.



Aim High students in a class at 601 Dolores. Our middle school campus served as the Mission District site for last summer's Aim High program.

In addition, we host monthly affinity gatherings for **Our Family Coalition**, where LGBTQ families can come together to build community, exchange parenting experiences, and provide support for one another.

We also partner with **SMART (Schools, Mentoring, And Resource Team)** and **Breakthrough**, two programs which seek to offer an excellent education to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds or with limited educational opportunities. ■

What Is the Indian Affinity Group?

Transitional Kindergarten Head Teacher Divya Vyas discusses her experiences as the mentor of one of CDS' newest affinity groups.

I am an international educator sitting with a group of Indian-American students who want to validate their daily experiences as people of Indian heritage in the San Francisco school system. I run CDS' new Indian affinity group, which was created to provide a safe space for children to talk about their life at CDS as Indian Americans.

I started the year with the question in the title of this article on my mind. Just before noon on a Thursday, I conducted my first lunch meeting with my students, Sareena, Ariyana, Janavi, Sophie, and Yuvaan. We sat at a round table in the Alligators classroom. I initiated the meeting by asking a question: What made you join the Indian Affinity group?

Conversations filled the round table, as it was Diwali season and the children had a lot to say. These were some of their responses:

- Sareena: "I am from Indian heritage and I want to share it with some grownups and friends."
- Yuvaan: "I want to meet Indian people at school."
- Ariyana: "I am excited it's almost Diwali and I want to share."
- Sophie: "I am going for several Diwali parties this year."
- Janavi: "I like treats during Diwali."

The mission of an international educator is to maintain the individuality of every child by keeping them connected to their roots. The atmosphere of our meetings is informal and intimate, and it creates discussions that promote a sense of belonging to the group. We will continue to share stories and ideas and make connections and meaning together. ■

—Divya Vyas, TK Head Teacher



On the CDS yard during this year's Diwali celebration

We hope you have enjoyed this third issue of Sparking Change, and look forward to hearing your feedback. Please feel free to send comments to Anthony Witte at anthonyw@cds-sf.org.