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## Our Ongoing Commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

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If you want to clear a room, begin talking about equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). I don't mean talking about EDI in an abstract way, but rather in a manner that necessitates reflection and action. Not everyone will feel uncomfortable and scurry away, but many will not want to discuss this topic except in safe, ineffectual generalities.

Addressing EDI and doing the work to change our systems and processes are not for the faint of heart. The fight for equality for all is going to be a long and arduous journey. Yet those who take up this important work and persevere are sources of inspiration and truth in a world that is often rife with systemic racism, micro-aggressions, and exclusions. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that, by the middle of 2020, nonwhites will account for the majority of the nation's 74 million children, and demographers project that whites will become a minority in the U.S. around 2045 (Nation 2020). These statistics do not include the other steadily increasing components of diversity. Our country is rapidly changing, and yet the need for EDI is still being questioned.

Within our profession, we must fight for every student to have equitable access to resources, educational opportunities, and certified school librarians. Equal opportunities to learn and succeed in life are the cornerstone of public education. School librarians have to speak up when we see inequity, draw attention to injustice, and advocate for our learners. We cannot allow outspoken opponents and those who feign ignorance of the necessity of equity for all to stymie our work. We must point out imbalances in learning resources and question

the motives of those who impede EDI advancements in education. To quote American activist Maggie Kuhn, "Speak your mind even if your voice shakes" (n.d.). As school librarians we must speak up for fairness.

Our learners are a testament to our changing world. We are raising a generation of searchers and truth seekers. We are teaching them to think critically, search for accurate information, and collaborate. Recent events have shown us that this upcoming generation possesses a passionate activist spirit. They do not need traditional leaders to dictate mandates. They see injustice and work to right the wrongs of their predecessors. As school librarians, don't we want to educate these visionaries with a global view of humanity? Don't we want to support their

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thirst for information by providing them with diverse curricula and resources? It doesn't matter if we work in diverse communities; we live in a diverse world, and that should be enough incentive to actively support EDI.

The past year has clearly illustrated the need for greater equity and diversity. It is not just education but also our justice, medical, social, cultural, and economic systems that all must be questioned as we assist our students to improve the future. Unique backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints add to the richness of life and the creativity of solutions. We must also champion diversity in our profession. It is important that our learners see themselves in every career, profession, and space and not feel limited by the perception of others.

It is easy to get EDI fatigue if you come from a place of privilege. Yet for many, weariness is not an option. Many of our learners and colleagues cannot simply disappear from the work until a later date. They don't get breaks from racism, discrimination, marginalization, or oppression. We all must stay committed to staying involved, which means making sure we manage our time, energy, and capacity accordingly. We cannot appease ourselves and believe that outrage in and of itself is action. *Action is action.*

There are countless articles, webinars, blogs, and other resources available to help us navigate how to include EDI into our programs and collections. So why not start with something simple? Some of my most enjoyable lunch conversations last year were with a Muslim student from Iraq. He and I discussed everything from religion to good books to favorite foods. A transgender student and I bonded over our love of animals and mystery novels. We became fast friends, and I got the biggest hug from her when she graduated. These encounters may seem simple, but they made a difference to each of us. How did I accomplish this? It's not complicated. I simply recognized and acknowledged their humanity and acted accordingly.

So don't feel compelled to immediately change your entire collection or to make some grand gesture toward inclusion. Begin by looking at your school library's services and collection through a different lens. Ask your students about their favorite authors, or conduct a diversity audit to ensure mirrors and windows are available for all learners. Be vigilant in weeding your collection of outdated titles that perpetuate stereotypes; misrepresentation is just as harmful as no representation, if not more so. Model a culture of inclusion by forming or revamping a library advisory group comprised of students, teachers, and other stakeholders who share your vision of

creating and cultivating an inclusive space and collection. Make a focused, intentional effort, and the results will follow.

Ours is not a nation founded on diversity and inclusion. Our country has a history of discrimination toward the LGBTQ+ community, citizens with disabilities, those from disparate religious backgrounds, and people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. But our past need not dictate our future. Ultimately, EDI boils down to treating people the way we want to be treated. This is the most basic tenet in any belief system, and yet these efforts are sometimes seen as controversial and divisive. We all should address barriers and historical factors that have led to unfair conditions for marginalized populations. Today, we have an opportunity to model a better way forward for our students. We must embrace that opportunity.

AASL's vision statement declares every school librarian is a leader, so be that leader in your learning community and in the world who pushes EDI forward. We can do this, and I have all the confidence in the world in us. We are school librarians, and when we put our minds to something, we are unstoppable!

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