

Supporting Racial Diversity FAQ

The desire to feel a sense of welcome and belonging is universal and we aim to deepen our shared understanding of and appreciation for racially diverse experiences to foster belonging at SLS.

What support does St. Luke's provide for students of color?

The Office of Equity & Inclusion trains faculty and staff, actively supports and encourages the creation of student-led affinity groups in Upper School, and works with families and students to identify similar needs in Middle School. Given the multimedia most students are exposed to and consuming, we aim to provide students with safe spaces to ask questions that can support and affirm their sense of self and help them to better understand others.

Currently, we have cultural affinity groups for students who identify as Pan-Asian, Black, Jewish, and/or Latine/Hispanic in the Upper School. In the Middle School, we also have an affinity space for students who self-identify as Black and/or Biracial. These student affinity groups often meet during a common lunch period or student club time and include 1-2 adult advisors. Learn more about affinity groups at St. Luke's [here](#).

What efforts are being made to increase racial diversity within the student body? Faculty?

On an ongoing basis, we identify and evaluate strategic opportunities to racially diversify the St. Luke's admissions pool through partnerships with community-based organizations (i.e. Waterside, Reach Prep, and RIISE), access to tuition assistance, and engagement with personal and community connections that reach beyond our school's campus. Various members of the St. Luke's community serve as ambassadors for the school and generously extend their connections to other local community groups and organizations. If you are interested in participating in these efforts through your personal or professional network, please reach out to the Director of Equity and Inclusion or Director of Enrollment.

A few years ago, we reimagined St. Luke's recruitment and interview processes to ensure we attract a more diverse pool of candidates, minimize implicit bias in hiring, and increase the cultural competency of all new employees. We have formed partnerships with organizations and service providers whose mission is to bring more students, faculty, and staff of color to predominantly white institutions like St. Luke's, and we ensure that all faculty and staff receive continuing education in these areas. We remain committed to these efforts, learning from and undeterred by the challenges.

When does SLS start talking about race, racial identity, and/or racism with students?

[The time to educate children](#) about issues around race is when they demonstrate awareness, curiosity, and the ability to contemplate experiences of their own and others. For some students, conversations about race are unavoidable and are had much earlier than others. For other students, conversations about race and racism occur for the first time as a result of being a part of a multiracial school community. This means some students arrive at St. Luke's with an acute sense of their racial identity, while other students arrive new to thinking about the influence of race in their lives. Our role as educators is to support every child.

At St. Luke's we aim to prepare all students to thrive in a global, multiracial world, therefore, topics of race, racial identity, and racism are present in the curricula at all grade levels at St. Luke's 5th through 12th, in developmentally appropriate and intentional ways. Teachers participate in ongoing professional development to stay current with best practices. For younger students, this learning is intended to

develop accurate and scientific language (e.g. melanin is responsible for skin color variations) and a foundation for more complex analysis in the upper school. When preparing to facilitate particularly complex conversations in our middle school classrooms, teachers will preview lessons with families, as part of routine communications, such as Academic Progress Reports, Back to School Night, communication from the Division Head, etc. These messages invite families to talk about the lessons at home and sometimes join in the learning by reading along in a book, for example.

How does the School address issues of racial discrimination or prejudice?

We want to create a safe and affirming learning environment that maintains the well-being of our community. As articulated in our student handbook, St. Luke's "...is committed to providing a safe and healthy learning environment for all members of its community. Such an environment precludes behaviors that are disrespectful of, and physically and/or emotionally harmful to others" (page 23) We do not make light of issues or incidents of racial discrimination or prejudice. In 2020-2021, St. Luke's established a protocol for reporting and responding to issues of bigotry, bullying, and discrimination, which is explained in full detail in the student handbook (pages 25-31).

In addressing issues of race and racial bias, in partnership with families, we look to help young people navigate the complexities of life, history, and choices. Throughout the process, we want to ensure that all students feel affirmed, informed, and supported. Our focus is on mutual respect, mutual concern, and acknowledging differences of perspective and experience.

We recognize the critical importance of ongoing faculty and staff training in this area and never see this work as "done." SLS faculty and staff always work to foster supportive relationships and ensure that discipline is addressed privately. We will not tolerate exclusion or harassment based on racial identity.

Does naming race mean I'm treating people differently? Why not encourage students to be colorblind?

This is a great question and one that we address with students as well. Race and skin color, like gender, are highly visible and to deny seeing them ultimately does more harm than good. To prepare St. Luke's students to thrive in an increasingly diverse society, we offer them opportunities to develop language and skills for navigating cross-racial relationships, in a supportive environment where they can take risks, ask questions and learn from inevitable mistakes.

We do not encourage "[colorblindness](#)" as a function of well-being because it inadvertently suggests that racism is not real, which enables people to disengage from conversations about race altogether. Instead, we want to support and expose students to complex conversations and critical thinking about race.

Teaching all students how to acknowledge and process hard histories, suffering, and divergent perspectives is part of character education and is required for building a moral compass at St. Luke's. "Collective guilt" whereby a generation of people are personally responsible for the acts of earlier generations, is not a part of responsible historical scholarship.

Knowledge and compassion are the learning goals and also where the power for good will be found. Using various community agreements and discussion guidelines to manage expectations during complex conversations, students are encouraged to speak for themselves, suspend judgment of themselves and others, and lead with curiosity. In the context of St. Luke's humanities courses,

discussions of race aim to support a more accurate and inclusive telling of U.S. history which includes complex histories and examples of racial inequality.

Does bringing attention to differences create more divisiveness within a school community?

"It's not our differences that divide us. It's our inability to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences." - Audre Lorde, American Writer

At St. Luke's, we affirm and support all students and create a school climate in which students feel comfortable in their own skin. In our efforts to foster positive racial identity development for **all** students, we welcome them to talk about their different experiences, as well as their similarities, and encourage empathy as a way to better understand other people.

For some students, issues related to race and racial identity are inescapable, particularly for students of color in a predominately white institution (PWI). Similar to psychosocial child development, [racial identity development](#) (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) tends to occur in stages and is directly impacted by individual experiences and social interactions. The stages of racial identity development do not necessarily follow a linear progression and for many young people, internalizing a positive racial identity and integrated sense of self is contingent upon adequate representation, accurate and balanced depictions of history and a learning environment that carefully considers the lived experiences and perspectives of all students.

Experiences rooted in [racism](#) negatively impact one's memory, the ability to concentrate, and make decisions. We know from social science research that children come to learn about race before they enter kindergarten, and that explicit conversations with 5 to 6 years olds about interracial friendships prove to dramatically improve racial attitudes ([Bronson & Merryman](#), 2009). We also know open, honest, frequent, and developmentally-appropriate conversations about race, racial differences, and even racial inequity are associated with lower levels of bias in children (Katz, 2003).

Additional Resources:

[Yale School of Medicine - Discussing Race with White Children \(Part 1\)](#)

[Scientific American - How Diversity Makes Us Smarter](#)

[PBS for Parents - Talking to Young Children About Race and Racism](#)

[The Century Foundation - How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit All Students
Children are Not Colorblind](#)