



Commitment to Antiracist Action

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The Association of College Counselors in Independent Schools (ACCIS) was founded to provide a supportive network for our membership. However, our work did not include an inclusive lens that was truly focused on “seeing” and valuing every member. ACCIS acknowledges that excluding the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of our mission inhibits our ability to fully support a critical component of our work as educators. Further, ACCIS acknowledges the long history of oppressive systems that have caused harm to students and our professional colleagues in independent schools.

ACCIS acknowledges the underlying premise and inherent racism of the creation of independent schools. They were founded to provide an educational experience rooted in white privilege that has historically excluded Black, Indigenous, and people of color, groups that have been most harmed by racism. As independent schools have slowly accepted students who are not in the majority, they have also sought to diversify the faculty and administration. This foundation has impacted students and adults who attend and work at our institutions in a number of ways. The underlying expectation of assimilation into the dominant culture has caused issues that impact self-esteem, mental health, and overall well-being. ACCIS members have experienced overt and covert racism while trying to work in these environments. ACCIS acknowledges the harm this expectation has created and the role our organization has in perpetuating these environments by not working to dismantle these systems. Moving forward, ACCIS will work to provide support and facilitate change within member schools. ACCIS believes that affirming spaces for people of color is essential toward our antiracist work and that White-identified people should follow the leadership of people of color in antiracist work.

As college admissions professionals, ACCIS acknowledges the legacy and persistence of exclusionary policies and practices in higher education. ACCIS must also realize the complicit nature of college counseling in independent school — in supporting our students, member schools may unknowingly advance racist policies that reinforce inequitable access to higher education. As an association, ACCIS must acknowledge that if our membership only acts in our self-interest, knowing that our schools serve disproportionately white and wealthier populations, then ACCIS is not doing justice to all students. If ACCIS members don't challenge themselves and their admissions colleagues to advance equitable policies, then ACCIS is perpetuating a cycle of inequality.

No single mission statement, professional development exercise, appointed diversity committee, or equity and inclusion practitioner will erase the historical realities of explicit and implicit racism in our schools. ACCIS members must continue to educate ourselves and dig deeper into what it means to become antiracist educators in antiracist schools and to put those two goals into practice. ACCIS acknowledges that regardless of one's own race or ethnicity, individuals are at various points along an antiracist journey. ACCIS understands that these practices and conversations require courage, respect and compassion, and may not always be or seek to be comfortable.

As an Association, ACCIS pledges to create and nurture a community that will work to overcome this history by committing not just to understanding the legacy of racism and inequality, but to challenge those systems and seek to commit to the work of anti-racism at all levels of the Association. ACCIS celebrates the human diversity that exists within our membership and in our schools, and believes for educational institutions to thrive there must be a commitment to antiracism at every level.

Initial Recommended Action Steps

- a. Create a plan that specifies how ACCIS responds to national incidents that impact members of our association and our communities.
- b. ACCIS Leadership will ensure this Commitment is shared broadly with the leaders of its member schools. The letter should include language that specifically addresses ACCIS's philosophy and commitment to antiracist practices.
- c. Review ACCIS's sponsorships and investments to ensure that ACCIS neither financially supports nor profits from organizations that engage in racist and classist practices.
- d. Provide information/context to membership on current practices (for example, counselor calls) in college counseling that often perpetuate a racist and classist system.
- e. When slating board candidates, the Governance and Nominating Committee will consider the DE&I capacities of candidates. When submitting statements for elections or appointments, candidates should include their DE&I-related experiences. In position descriptions for ACCIS leaders, include expectations that they will actively engage in DEI initiatives.
- f. When hiring candidates for paid positions, the Board will consider the DE&I capacities of candidates. Searches will be broad and inclusive.
- g. Amend ACCIS school membership criteria to include a commitment to DE&I.
- h. Continuously audit programming to ensure that a DE&I lens is always in place.
- i. Report annually to the membership detailing the Association's steps toward accountability to these Action Steps and in adhering to antiracist practices.