



Belonging at SMUS

Our Next Steps in Equity, Diversity & Inclusion



St. Michaels University School



Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that this school rests in the heart of Straits Salish territory, a living culture with its own rites, ceremonies, and unfolding history. We honour the Esquimalt, Songhees, and WSÁNEĆ peoples – whose homelands we share and whom we recognize as our neighbours.

Our Values



Respect



Courage



Honesty



Service



Inclusion and Belonging at SMUS

Respect is a core value of our community. When we're at our best, it's alive in every interaction and decision. At the same time, we know that we have much to learn, including what it means to be a fully equitable, diverse and inclusive community.

Our hope is that this plan will provide a structure that sets our feet firmly on a path to more fully realize our potential. It's both a reflection of who we are and who we desire to become as individuals and as a community.

We do not anticipate an end point in this work. We are also clear that the plans we articulate today will likely be revisited and revised. We will remain open to new insights and perspectives, while steadily moving forward with the guidance we've received to date.

“Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better.”

- Maya Angelou

Mission

Our school seeks the excellence in all of us, with passion and compassion. We are a community shaped by the pursuit of truth and goodness, providing outstanding preparation for life.

Seeking excellence is about more than stretching ourselves in terms of academic, athletic or artistic prowess. It's also about character and how we engage with each other. It requires us to be present to life experiences and perspectives that differ from our own.

In talking about the “pursuit” of truth and goodness, we recognize that such notions are not fixed. There is no point of arrival. When we seek to build an environment where all can thrive, we continuously broaden our thinking and enrich our lives. This better prepares us for a world that is itself diverse and fluid, generating its own stream of evolving possibilities and challenges.

Creating a community that reflects these qualities entails an approach that is both passionate and compassionate. As we move through the steps outlined in this plan, we will stay attentive to the diverse needs of individuals within our community. We appreciate that this work can create discomfort as we challenge our assumptions and shift longstanding practices. At the same time, we will seek to be highly intentional in our approach. We are not looking to replace one way of being that excludes a set of people with another way of being that discounts a different set of people. Rather, we are seeking to thoughtfully expand our existing practice to better include those currently at our margins.

By being rooted in our mission and guided by our core values, we stretch ourselves to become a community where our members have more reason to feel valued and included, and where belonging is at the heart of everything we do.



EDI Pillars



01 Leadership & Accountability

- **Guidance and accountability**
- **Principled policies and guidelines**
- **Communication and engagement**

02 Education & Curriculum

- **Transformational learning**
- **Inclusive and diverse curriculum**

03 School Environment

- **A learning community that centres belonging**
- **Diverse staff and leadership**
- **Welcoming facilities and infrastructure**

As a welcoming and evolving community, we recognize that our approaches grow with new learnings and the diverse perspectives of those who join us. We have only to look at our way of being as a school 50 or 100 years ago to know that being responsive to a changing student body and world has always been a part of our identity. In continuing our commitment to fostering a sense of belonging at St. Michaels University School (SMUS), we are pleased to share our next steps. This plan is a thoughtful collaboration and ongoing reflection. It is designed to address the many dimensions of EDI principles within the SMUS school community.

Key Concepts

It is helpful to be grounded in shared language to support positive progress in our work together. Below is our context for the terms equity, diversity and inclusion:

Equity

We commit ourselves to providing students and staff with what they need to fully participate in their endeavours and meet with success throughout their educational and career journeys. The pursuit of equity requires that we explore and amend systemic imbalances and barriers faced by some members of our community.

Diversity

We honour the range of social experiences, conditions, thinking and identities that include race, ethnicity, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, physical ability, learning style, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, class, and/or socio-economic situation.

Inclusion

We cultivate an environment where everyone is able to thrive in authentic ways. Inclusion means that we value and cultivate full and meaningful engagement of all our members in a healthy and affirming climate.



SMUS Community Snapshot

At SMUS, students and staff are the heart of the community. Our mission implores us to “seek the excellence in all of us”. Part of that excellence is tied to the degree to which we embrace the benefits arising from our diversity. To foster this pursuit of excellence for the collective “us”, we must continue to evolve our understanding of what it means to cultivate and sustain an environment where students, staff and guests feel welcomed, included and empowered. Together, we understand that this work requires a collective commitment to continuous improvement, both as individuals and as a community, as we work towards a more just and inclusive world.



Looking Back

This moment in our EDI journey reflects a significant point along a continuum of work. As we continue to learn and grow, we want to be mindful of opportunities to acknowledge and celebrate our progress and achievements as well as our growing pains and challenges. Over the last few years, we have taken key steps which have led us to the this document of our next steps.

- In 2020, SMUS sought an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion guide. Together, we started a process to engage stakeholders, formulate goals and strategies, track performance, formalize points of accountability and establish an ongoing reflective practice.
- From 2020-2022, SMUS convened a community-nominated EDI Advisory Committee to work alongside our guide and represent stakeholder groups in the SMUS community. The committee represented a cross-section of our community including alumni, parents, alumni parents, students and staff.
- In 2021 SMUS students, staff and members of the broader learning community co-created an EDI Statement to signal our values and commitment to the work and establish shared language and understanding.
- Between 2020-2022 the EDI Advisory Committee gathered and analyzed stakeholder perspectives and information from across our community and shared recommendations to the Senior Leadership Team and Board of Governors to form the basis of the school's next steps in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.
- In 2023 these recommendations were consolidated in an EDI Recommendations Summary, including a recommendation to secure an EDI Coordinator to support our continued planning and collaborative work.
- Through 2024-25 the sum of this foundational work led to the development of our draft, and then a finalized plan for next steps.

Looking Forward



We envision a future where our pursuit of inclusion and belonging is woven into every aspect of the school. By fostering a learning environment that respects and embraces the unique identities of each student and staff member, we reflect the true diversity of our community. Guided by our values—Honesty, Courage, Service, and Respect—we aim to evolve the transformative learning experiences that prepare students to thrive in an interconnected world.

This work benefits from a strategic approach, seeking the untapped opportunities or new possibilities of the practices that shape our school. Through collaboration and the alignment of resources, we strive for those changes that will demonstrate across our community the importance of this work. We invite everyone to engage with open hearts and minds, and to support one another in this collective journey.





**As we continue forward, we will
centre three foundational elements
of how are we doing this work:**

01

Individually and collectively

We recognize that fostering inclusion and belonging is a synergistic enterprise, requiring both individual and institutional commitment. Just as our collective action impacts our individual effort, each unique contribution uplifts this work and shapes the whole.

02

Intentionally

This work is a marathon not a sprint. It is important that we move intentionally and consistently over time by engaging in conversation about power and privilege as it impacts our students and their worlds. The work will tap into SMUS's historical responsiveness to the shifting needs of our student body. It will require stewardship, support and resourcing. By documenting these next steps, our strategy is to become more effective in this work.

03

With space and grace for ongoing learning

This work is not easy and it is not straightforward. It will often feel like we are making mistakes or that we are progressing imperfectly. We acknowledge that this is to be expected and we will strive to be understanding of each other, as we learn individually and collectively.

Our Process at a Glance

1

Establishing Foundations and Planning

Strengthening our EDI journey. SMUS's commitment to EDI has been evolving for many years. This plan builds off the EDI Summary Recommendations Report, which was developed by the EDI Advisory committee in **2023** and approved by the Board of Governors. The plan builds on that foundation and ongoing progress with input from staff, leadership and stakeholders.



2

Implementing and Learning

Our next steps in EDI moves into an implementation phase in **2025**. Our first year of implementation will be an opportunity to reflect and learn together. We will establish benchmarks to assess current status and progress indicators, along with moving forward with concrete action on initial steps that are laid out.

3

Growth and Adjustment

As we move into our second year, **2026**, our learning and progress will signal where and how we adjust and affirm our initiatives and processes. We will begin this phase with the co-creation of a vision for the continuation of this work from a place of shared understanding.

4

Extending and Evolving

In the third year of this plan, **2027**, systemic and cultural change shifts will position each of us and the school as a whole to better respond to the diverse needs of our community's members. Our learning will extend and our work will evolve.

Leadership and Accountability

We recognize the importance of establishing clear benchmarks that will be regularly monitored to ensure effective implementation and sustained momentum of the plan. This work requires passion and leadership rooted in *Honesty and Courage*, along with experience with EDI principles combined with a shared sense of ownership across our community.

As we continue this transformative journey, it is vital to foster a grassroots approach to EDI stewardship that empowers every member of our school to contribute meaningfully. Integrating EDI into our strategic planning ensures alignment and synergies across initiatives, driving sustainable change.

Our goal is to review, revise and, where needed, create policies and procedures that reflect our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion—upholding the core values of *Respect and Service*. We aim to support all students and staff.

In keeping with our value of Honesty, we are committed to open and constructive communication. We will maintain clear, open channels to engage our community, share progress, and invite feedback, ensuring that everyone remains informed and involved in our ongoing EDI efforts.



Leadership and Accountability

Approach 1: Robust guidance and support to ensure successful implementation and continued progress of the next steps laid out in this plan.

Strategies:

- SMUS Senior Leadership will be responsible for overseeing portfolios within this plan, holding accountability for progress and outcomes. The work will be informed through specialized advisory groups that bring their expertise and insights to guide and inform the work.
- Development of a benchmarking process to offer clear insights into SMUS's current position on this journey, providing a tangible way to measure progress and impact over time.
- Foster and maintain a culture of openness, collaboration and shared ownership around these goals and priorities, encouraging active communication and feedback.
- While reviewing and revising SMUS's strategic plans, these key EDI principles are at the centre of maintaining strong strategic alignment between the updated SMUS Strategic Plan and our next steps in EDI.

Approach 2: SMUS's EDI journey and principles are clearly communicated and reflected in how the school engages with students, staff and the broader public.

Strategies:

- Approaches to communication will demonstrate EDI principles.
- Regular communication shared on the progress and journey as we move through these next steps.

Approach 3: Inclusive and supportive school policies and guidelines that foster a strong sense of belonging for all, while reflecting our dedication to equity, diversity and inclusion.

Strategies:

- Comprehensive policies and procedures that promote belonging, using the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion, to align with the values of our learning community. Educators and decision-makers supported with an expanded range of tools to be equipped to support informed decisions that foster belonging. An openness to refining these approaches as new insights and practices emerge will be essential.
- Continual assessment of SMUS policies and guidelines for clarity and accessibility to ensure they meet the needs of our community.
- Policies and procedures will reflect appropriate, up-to-date language, reflecting best practices with a commitment to continuous review to assure relevancy and effectiveness.

Education and Curriculum

In the classroom, we understand and actively engage with principles of inclusion and belonging. By embracing values of respect, honesty, courage and service, we aim to create a learning environment where every student feels valued, supported, and empowered to fully participate in the pursuit of truth and goodness.

When students feel they belong, they are more engaged, open to learning and able to thrive. By creating inclusive and supportive spaces, we optimize learning. Students who feel respected and heard are more likely to participate fully, share their perspectives, and collaborate effectively. Our goal is to provide transformative learning experiences that challenge perspectives, foster empathy, and equip both educators and students to discern and effect change where needed, grounded in these core values.

We strive to deliver curricula that celebrate diverse ways of knowing, learning, and expressing, positioning students to flourish. This approach not only supports academic success but also prepares students to thoughtfully engage with diverse cultures and perspectives. By embedding these principles into our teaching, we foster deeper learning, mutual respect, and a sense of belonging that enhances both personal and intellectual growth.



Education and Curriculum

Approach 4: We seek to foster a community of equity-minded staff, who are committed to learning about creating a community of belonging. Our hope is to build on our ability to create transformative educational experiences that prepare students to thrive in a diverse and interconnected world.

Strategies:

- Comprehensive learning opportunities that will further empower staff to deepen their understanding of belonging and integrate EDI principles into their teaching, leadership and everyday practice.
- Continued support for a culture of continuous learning and growth where all staff can engage in learning experiences that challenge assumptions, expand perspectives and inspire action towards belonging and inclusion.
- Provide these learning opportunities at all levels of the school—encompassing all staff, leadership and the SMUS Board of Governors.

Approach 5: Our educators will deepen their ability to confidently deliver a curriculum that celebrates diverse ways of knowing, learning, and expressing. Particular attention will be paid to the learning environment, including the setting itself. This will further support all students to thrive in the classroom and it will prepare students to engage thoughtfully and respectfully with diverse cultures, perspectives and worldviews.

Strategies:

- Provide assessment tools for EDI focused review, revision, and coordination of curriculum across departments and across divisions.
- Diverse opportunities for students to critically examine their own cultural assumptions and biases, fostering self-awareness and promoting cultural humility.
- Expand and highlight our professional library for resources that support transformational learning and curricular development connected to culturally safe, accessible and equitable learning spaces.



School Environment



Welcoming and belonging in the classroom are enriched when we actively understand and commit to principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Guided by our core values of respect, honesty, courage and service, we aim to create an environment where every student and staff member feels valued, supported, and empowered to thrive. This aligns with our School's Mission:

***“Our school seeks the excellence in all of us with passion and compassion.
We are a community shaped by the pursuit of truth and goodness,
providing outstanding preparation for life.”***

Staff play a vital role in this vision by being committed to these principles, helping to create positive, transformative experiences for students. When educators lead with courage and respect, they foster inclusive and supportive spaces where students can fully engage in their learning journey. A strong sense of belonging allows students to participate more fully, share their perspectives openly, and collaborate effectively, all of which contribute to deeper learning and personal growth.

We are committed to delivering curricula that celebrate diverse ways of knowing, learning, and expressing, ensuring that all students are prepared to thrive within the classroom and beyond. This approach not only supports academic excellence but also equips students with compassion and the ability to thoughtfully engage with diverse cultures and perspectives. In doing so, we foster a learning community where mutual respect, empathy and meaningful connections can flourish.

Our efforts extend beyond academics to all aspects of school life. We are actively recruiting, retaining, and supporting a diverse staff who understand the central role of belonging and inclusion. This strengthens the community and well-being of both students and staff, ensuring that everyone feels they belong and can contribute meaningfully to school life.

Physical spaces are also crucial in fostering a sense of belonging. We are exploring ways to create and enhance environments that are welcoming, inclusive and accessible for everyone. By improving the inclusivity of our campuses, we create a physical environment where all members of our community can feel seen and valued. Ultimately, these efforts help us create a vibrant and thriving community that embodies belonging and inclusion.

School Environment

Approach 6: The diversity of our faculty and staff will move closer to reflecting the diversity of our students and community.

Strategies:

- Review, revise and implement proactive strategies to recruit, retain and support a diverse team of staff
- Increase the representation of individuals from historically underrepresented and marginalized groups across staff positions.
- Commitment to fostering a workplace where staff feel valued, respected and supported including actively seeking feedback and making continuous improvements based on their experience and needs.

Approach 7: Our approach to student life prioritizes the well-being, inclusion and sense of belonging of all students, ensuring they have the support and resources needed to thrive as active members of our learning community.

Strategies:

- Embrace shifts in systemic and individual practice so that students are better positioned to experience our school as a welcoming and inclusive environment.
- Build on school curriculum using a cultural, philosophical, moral and community-centred lens.
- Approaches to school rituals and co-curricular activities will reflect the diversity within our school in ways that allow everyone to participate in traditions.
- Service Learning programs focused on strengthening commitment to cultural humility and deep global learning.
- Continually strengthen supports for student well-being and mental health.
- SMUS boarding environment will continue to evolve to support inclusivity and belonging.

Approach 8: Our spaces are welcoming, accessible and inclusive of everyone, reflecting the diversity of our learning community.

Strategies:

- Continue to foster an environment that is supportive of an equitable experience of all students and staff through improving the accessibility of our campuses.
- SMUS maps and signage will support accessibility and promote the full enjoyment of our campuses.
- The diversity of the look, feel, spatial organization and iconography in our spaces will expand to reflect and celebrate the diverse identities, cultures, expressions, and perspectives of our local and global communities.

Measuring Success

Our challenge and commitment extend beyond immediate actions, requiring us to be strategic and forward-thinking in building an infrastructure that supports informed decision-making and sustainable progress in equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). At SMUS, we are dedicated to understanding—through data and personal experiences—where we have been, where we are now, and what meaningful change looks like. Developing and strengthening systems for data collection, analysis, reflection, and evaluation is a core part of our journey toward success.

To enhance belonging and create a more equitable and inclusive environment, we are committed to identifying the best approaches to emerging insights. This will require strategic investments and carefully developed strategies that are informed by both current best practices and evolving global trends. We will reach out to other schools so that we benefit from their experiences. The systems we develop will allow us to collect, leverage and adapt our initiatives to meet the evolving needs of our school community. This work is not just about addressing current challenges, but about creating a flexible and sustainable framework for future growth.

By embedding these principles into every aspect of school life, we support our vision of Leading, Learning, and Serving, fostering a stronger commitment to inclusion and belonging in all that we do as we move forward together.





St. Michaels University School



St. Michaels University School is a
Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12
boarding and day school of over
1,000 students.



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smus.ca