

Statement of Inclusive Excellence

I attended a unique middle school. Despite being in 6th through 8th grade during the mid 2000s - a time when democratic presidents still opposed gay marriage and no one had heard terms like intersectional - my school was decidedly centered around social justice, had ample queer faculty, and actively promoted female empowerment. Once a month, my school would gather for "Anti-Bias Friday." These were school-wide symposia featuring topics like "Feminism and Islam: A Debate Over The Hijab" or "Who should be allowed to use the N-word?"

Until the debate over "DEI curriculum in schools" exploded in 2020, I wasn't aware that discussions surrounding privilege, equality, equity, and belonging were rare in educational settings. Nor did such discussions feel political to me. Rather, I have always seen hard conversations about where we come from, how we identify, confirmation bias, etc. as essential to helping an individual develop critical thinking skills, empathy, an independent point of view, and teamwork abilities.

When I became a teacher, I knew that in my classroom fostering diversity and discussions regarding this diversity were of the utmost importance to me. I drafted a commitment to my students which I could update as the years went on, but which would hold me to a rigorous standard of acceptance, inclusion, sensitivity and support in my teaching. The following is the commitment as it stands today:

In my classroom respect is valued above all else. Respect is a verb. A daily practice. I promise to respect my students. I expect respect in return. And students are expected to respect one another.

Every student in my classroom has a right to feel at home. That they belong. That they are free to be the fullest expression of themselves. This means that I do not tolerate discrimination of any kind - racial, religious, gendered, marital, ability based, socioeconomic or political.

I understand that friction and conflict are inevitable when diverse people come together. In my classroom I value conflict resolution and do my best to equip students with the communication and emotional skills to work with and through their differences.

I acknowledge that while providing physical and emotional safety to all students is possible in a classroom, it is important for students to step out of their comfort zones intellectually. Thinking big, thinking independently, and taking the risk to change one's own mind often feels scary. I hold space for intellectual risk and growth in my classroom.

In my classroom diversity of thought is respected. I will teach students how to think - critically, carefully and compassionately - not what to think. I will teach students how to dexterously articulate and communicate their thinking and/or convictions. And I will teach my students how to challenge their own thinking - a skill necessary for becoming one's own teacher and a lifelong student.

I promise to treat each of my students as unique individuals. To honor the life experience, stories, skills, and innate wisdom they bring to the classroom. I promise to listen to, engage, and address the interests, needs, and strengths they bring into the learning environment. I promise to see my students as teachers in their own right. To learn from them myself and to let them lead others in the classroom when appropriate.

I promise to empower my students - helping them create, innovate, pioneer, dream and express themselves freely and authentically in an often restrictive world. And I promise to give my students all the tools they need to “play by the rules” of life or society should they so choose.

I acknowledge the power dynamic between student and teacher. I believe every student should have a voice and a channel for self advocacy in the classroom. I will always provide my students with an outlet for feedback - both anonymous and non-anonymous. Furthermore, I will provide my students with the resources necessary to engage school administration should they have concerns about the classroom, learning environment, or my teaching.

I promise to continue my own education. To continually learn new teaching techniques, to maintain an active, vital and professional artistic practice, to stay fresh and up to date in my teaching pedagogy, to consume as much art as possible, and to remain in artistic and professional dialogue with mentors, my peers and the next generation of artists and teachers.

Alongside the commitments I have to my students, I'd like to take a moment to share the diversity of skill and knowledge I bring to a school or performance setting.

I have a great deal to offer with regard to accepting, celebrating, and accommodating neurodiversity on a campus and onstage. Since middle school I have volunteered and worked with differently abled adults and teens - in both day centers and the drama classroom. While working at Seattle Children's Theatre, I had the opportunity to assist special drama classes for children with autism and to attend training on building curriculum for children with special needs. I have a professional relationship with the National Disability Theatre, and in my two years teaching at Sing With Emily, I had the pleasure of coaching professional child actors with Down Syndrome and young adult actors with autism spectrum disorder as they transitioned from college to being professional actors.

I appreciate how making space for neurodiversity in a school, workplace or performance space helps all people to become more sensitive and clear in their communication, more thoughtful about the physical environments we build and maintain on a daily basis, more self aware, and more attuned to the many different kinds of intelligence that help the world go 'round.

I welcome your questions, thoughts, concerns, or ideas about this statement.