

# TECH LEADERSHIP ROLES: MAKING FIRST IMPRESSIONS

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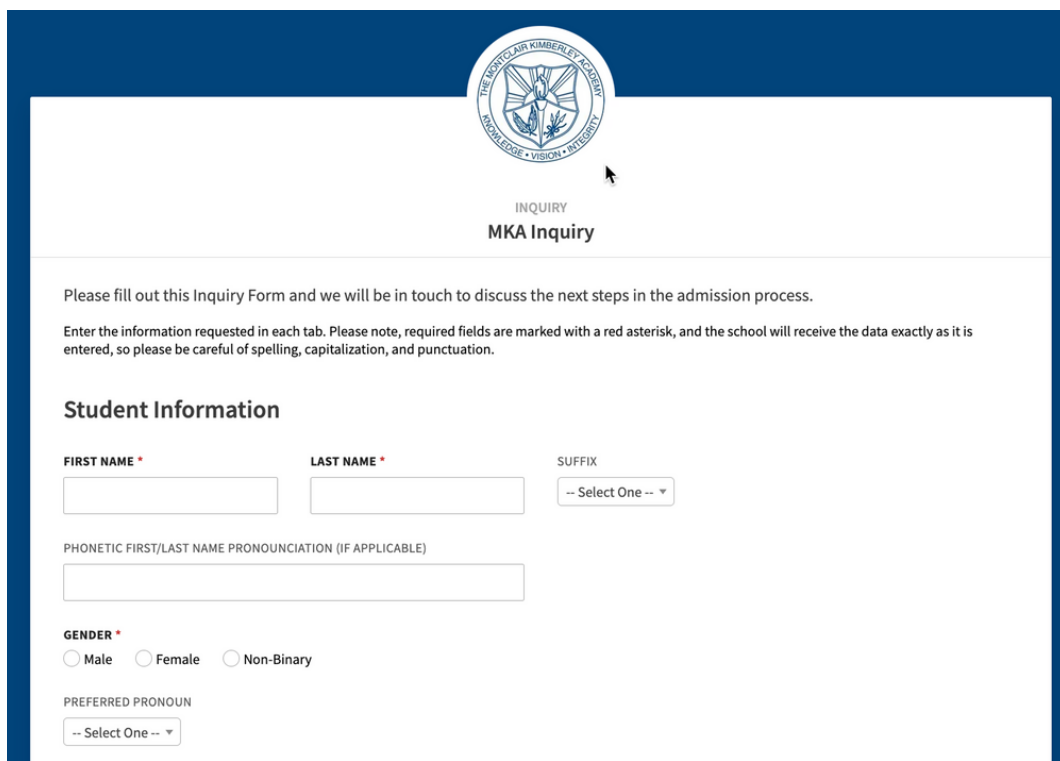
Perhaps a strange application of the purported Winston Churchill quote, “Never let a good crisis go to waste,” but when a parent was misgendered in a school mailing, it felt like an excellent time for the technology department to step up and take a leadership role in how data about identity, diversity, and equity is managed. The tech team immediately had to figure out how this incident occurred, why it had occurred (data migration from a previous system), and how to resolve the issue. The team then had to ensure this did not happen again; that meant reviewing the current data in the system, training the primary handlers on how to make changes and check for errors in the data, and auditing how new data made it into the system. In this specific case, and areas of identity, community, and belonging, Tech has to take a leadership role.


Tech leadership in the work of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) will look different across the country; for instance, what ethnicities independent schools track in the northeastern United States versus the Hawaiian islands will look very different, so this article will not delve into the differences nor minutiae, but rather will focus on skills learned in taking a leadership role in propagating community and belonging in independent school communities.

What does that look like?

# PART 1

## KNOW YOUR SYSTEMS, KNOW YOUR SCHOOL, KNOW YOUR REGION



  
INQUIRY  
MKA Inquiry

Please fill out this Inquiry Form and we will be in touch to discuss the next steps in the admission process.

Enter the information requested in each tab. Please note, required fields are marked with a red asterisk, and the school will receive the data exactly as it is entered, so please be careful of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

### Student Information

FIRST NAME \*

LAST NAME \*

SUFFIX

PHONETIC FIRST/LAST NAME PRONUNCIATION (IF APPLICABLE)

GENDER \* ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Non-Binary

PREFERRED PRONOUN

Technology providers in schools have not always kept pace with cultural norms. Not so long ago, school information systems (SIS) like Veracross only had binary options for gender, and there was no field to track pronouns. This has changed, but there are still no perfect SISes when it comes to fully representing an entire school community. Leaving aside, changing your SIS may be prohibitive for any number of reasons; what to do?

Take a deep dive into your system. Find out everything there is to know about your system when it comes to identity, community, and belonging from a system perspective. Talk to the SIS vendor and other schools that use the same system and see what they are doing. Test different elements of the system - test what happens to mail merges when he/him or they/them pronouns are applied to a particular person. Learn your system inside and out.

Get data into the hands of the people who know your community. In the tech office, it may be impossible to know every detail about every family, but train the teams on how the system works, provide them with queries or reports of the data, and make it easily accessible! Training and accessibility go a long way to ensure nurses, administrators, and administrative assistants feel comfortable reviewing and updating the data.

Finally, know what the local area schools are doing. Compare their inquiry forms, SIS, and application processes against your own. Keep an eye out for any fields that have to do with identity and belonging, i.e., pronouns, gender (do they have non-binary options), and even athletics and clubs. Are the teams and clubs gendered? Armed with this data, the tech office can make its case for changes in how this essential data is collected and stored.

INQUIRY FORM - Gender Inclusive Data Points						
School	Gender - Student	Preferred Pronouns	Prefix	Relationships	Gender - Person Inquiring	Activities
A	Yes (non-binary)	Yes	No	No	N/A	Detailed, Gender-based
B	Yes (non-binary & other)	N/A	Text field	No	N/A	General options
C	Yes (other)	Yes	No	No	N/A	General, season sports - tennis only gendered sport
D	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
E	Yes (non-binary)	N/A	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
F	Yes (non-binary)	N/A	Text field	No	Yes (non-binary)	N/A

N/A = Not asked on form.

# PART 2 COME PREPARED



Now that you have reviewed your system, your SIS, and the local area schools, you have information to bring to the table. You know how your system works, your data, and what your competitors are doing, so you can now meaningfully contribute to the conversation.

A Head of Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism (DIAR) once said when talking about their office's work, "Bring your expertise to the table." They meant that if you are a history teacher, do not come to a conversation about Black History Month with nothing and expect the DIAR office to have everything ready; come prepared with your knowledge and experience.

The same goes for technology; if a question like correct name pronunciation arises, don't turn it over to your DIAR office; take a leadership role in creating community at your school. Do the research, find the limitations, talk to other schools to see what they are doing, and then take this information to the appropriate people.



# PART 3 PASSING THE BATON - NEXT DEPARTMENT UP MAKING AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY THE NORM

As one school year begins to fade and the other ramps up over the summer, each Technology department and school is familiar with the "passing of the baton" that happens. In schools, this is often the transition of our newly enrolled families moving from the care of the Admissions office to the Deans Office, and of course to the care of our hard working and nurturing faculty. Our work as described in part 1 and part 2 doesn't just stop once we have a family enrolled. Yes, creating that first impression is more important than ever these days, especially with the independent school market becoming more competitive than ever.

The first day of school is intimidating, not only for students but for faculty. First impressions are everything. It is unrealistic to think that each faculty member will have read through each student's inquiry and/or application for the 30-40 students they will be teaching this term. For many, besides a brief chat on a tour or revisit day, this is the first time meeting each other. So now is the time to invest in your faculty. Invest in tools that allow them to succeed. If funding is short, at a minimum invest the hours into a process that can help make your teacher's first impression memorable.





# PART 4

## THE TOOLBOX

### IT CAN TAKE TIME TO GET IT RIGHT



As discussed in Part 1, not all SIS platforms have all that many options, let alone integrations for data related to inclusivity. This leaves schools searching for the right tool that is not only easy to use but improves our students' experience. After all, that's why we are in this business.

When selecting a tool, Technology leaders will generally ask the following question first, what platforms do you integrate with? Of course, this might be a close second to how much does this thing cost, anyway? A strong integration with Canvas is what led Kent School to move forward with NameCoach. We knew name pronunciation was something we wanted to strive to be better at. This would make for a stronger and more inclusive community. For the past few years, our solution was to ask our Marketing and Communications team to record a video of each student speaking their name and where they were from. A staff member would then upload these videos to a Google Shared Drive and expect our Faculty to sort through all 520 students to find the ones they teach. As you can imagine, this was successful at first, though the tedious process quickly resulted in our EID office and Marketing team looking for a new solution.

A product like namecoach, allows our school to put our EID initiatives to the front of our summer onboarding tasks that we ask our students to complete. Using our Canvas integration, Students now have the option to record their name and/or pronouns before classes start. This allows teachers to view their students' pronouns and listen to the correct name pronunciation BEFORE the first day of classes.



# PART 5

## THE READING OF THE NAMES

Every year, a few faculty members get the esteemed honor to read the names of our graduating class. The pressure is on! After all, as we have mentioned consistently throughout this article, first impressions are everything, well your final impressions are often the most lasting.

Leaning on a tool like NameCoach, Flipgrid, or an LMS quiz can help you shine bright in your students' final moments at your school. Without this becoming an ad for Namecoach, enter this solution yet again.

Seeking a better way to collect our graduating students information that is needed for graduation, Kent once again turned to NameCoach. Leveraging the forms feature within the platform, students were able to fill out/record the following information:

- Name
- Name on Diploma
- Name to be read at graduation
- Phonetic Spelling
- NameBadge (pronunciation) upload

Once the data is collected, admins can easily share a read-only version to the graduation name readers, award presenters and the Head of School. This allows them to not only view the phonetic spelling of the students they are recognizing but also listen to the pronunciation on repeat, until content. Think of this as the Rosetta Stone for graduation ceremonies!

# PART 6

## 'DON'T GO IT ALONE'



As an IT leader in an educational setting, it's crucial to understand that effective technology integration is fundamentally supported by strategic partnerships with vendors who not only align with but actively support our school's mission, vision, and values. These relationships extend beyond mere business transactions; they are crucial alliances that significantly enhance our educational landscape.

The role of our IT department goes beyond ensuring compliance and functionality; it actively enriches our school's technological capabilities in a manner that upholds and promotes Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB). This commitment influences our strategic choices, making the following five elements essential for our data structure and overall organizational strategy:

### 1. Identifying Core Programs and Values:

- **IT Perspective:** Assess which technology programs are vital to our educational mission. This involves a thorough evaluation of technologies and programs to determine which are indispensable and uniquely contribute to our school's identity and operational excellence.

### 2. Engaging the Board in Strategic IT Decisions:

- **IT Approach:** Develop strategies to effectively involve the school board in key technology decisions. This includes presenting well-researched IT data and strategic considerations that support informed decision-making and align with long-term educational goals.

### 3. The Role of External IT Consultants:

- **IT Strategy:** Determine when to engage external IT consultants to enhance our technological capabilities or infrastructure projects. Weigh the benefits of external expertise in achieving advanced IT solutions against the challenges it may pose to internal processes and data security.

### 4. Balancing Data-Driven Decisions with Mission Alignment:

- **IT Implementation:** Ensure that all IT decisions are both data-informed and mission-aligned. This involves integrating both qualitative and quantitative tech data to guide our strategic planning, ensuring technology decisions support educational excellence and innovation.

### 5. Long-Term Tracking and Evaluation of IT Strategic Initiatives:

- **IT Monitoring:** Implement mechanisms to track and evaluate the effectiveness of new or revised IT initiatives. Establish clear metrics for success and conduct regular reviews to ensure these initiatives continue to support and enhance the school's mission and educational objectives.

These five elements are integral to the IT department's role in shaping a technologically advanced, inclusive, and mission-driven educational environment. By adhering to these principles, we not only leverage technology to enhance learning but also ensure our tech initiatives reflect the values and aspirations of our school community.