



2026 Equity & Inclusion Conference

Thursday, October 22 and Friday, October 23
Hilton Post Oak, Houston, TX

October 22

October 22 | 8:30 – 9:00 a.m.

Coffee, continental breakfast, and conference check-in

October 22 | 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Opening Session

Our work as DEI Practitioners is more and more complex, whether we work full or part time or have titles of “Director,” “Coordinator,” “Teacher,” or “Counselor.” Our job descriptions include every division, department and constituency, and we are meant to play roles that vary from teacher to collaborator, cheerleader to accountability partner, and leader to team player. We are crisis managers and pastors, confidants and strategists engaged in a delicate dance of community building across differences that can sometimes feel great. And yet, we serve schools committed to doing the work of teaching and preparing students for democratic citizenship, for leadership and innovation, and for crafting a better world for future generations.

This kick-off workshop for our conference will be an interactive, thought-provoking opportunity to connect with colleagues, mine our collective expertise, and build skills for a strategic path forward. We will gather in this opening session to:

- Make meaningful connections with peer practitioners
- Deepen understanding of ourselves as leaders of this work
- Expand our DEI knowledge and toolkits
- Learn and practice DEI strategy for sustainable movement forward.

Martha Haakmat, Executive Director, Haakmat Consulting LLC



October 22 | 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

Lunch together at the hotel

October 22 | 1:00 – 2:15 p.m.

Rooted in the Work: Practices for Connection, Restoration, and Sustainable Leadership

Those committed to creating more equitable, affirming, and compassionate communities are often asked to hold a great deal: the needs of students and colleagues, institutional challenges, moments of conflict and uncertainty, and the emotional weight of work that is deeply personal. Over time, caring deeply without intentional practices for restoration can leave even our most committed educators and leaders feeling depleted or disconnected.

Rooted in the Work is an experiential session exploring how contemplative and restorative practices can help educators and school leaders remain connected—to themselves, to one another, and to the purpose that brought them to this work.

Through guided reflection, mindfulness, accessible breathwork, restorative practices, and facilitated dialogue, participants will examine their own experiences with compassion fatigue and disconnection while practicing tools that can support regulation, presence, and sustainable leadership. Rather than positioning wellness as another responsibility to add to an already-full plate, this session invites participants to consider restoration as part of how we sustain meaningful work over time.

Participants will leave with practical practices they can return to individually and within their school communities, as well as space to reconnect with the values and relationships that make the work worth sustaining.

Anthony Perdue, Educator, Wellness Practitioner, Founder of Magic Mind Studio

October 22 | 2:15 – 2:30 p.m.

Break

October 22 | 2:30 – 3:30 p.m.

Culture is the Curriculum: What Are We Teaching Without Saying a Word?

We think deeply about curriculum, what students should know, understand, and ultimately become. But culture is teaching all the time. Students and adults learn what matters by observing who is heard, who is trusted, whose contributions are recognized, how mistakes are handled, how conflict is navigated, which traditions are protected, what behaviors are tolerated, and whether our stated values are reflected in everyday decisions.



This panel brings together a variety of perspectives from individuals who experience and influence school culture through their various roles. Join us for a rich conversation about not only the culture we intend to build, but the culture our communities experience.

Led by Dr. Lorre Allen, St. Mark's School of Texas

October 22 | 3:30 – 4:30 p.m.

Networking Café

Stay for this afternoon session of networking with your colleagues. There will be collaboration stations to share ideas and ask questions, plus some afternoon treats.

October 22 | 4:30 p.m.

Evening on your own in Houston

October 23

October 23 | 7:30 – 8:30 a.m.

Breakfast Buffet at the hotel

October 23 | 8:30 – 11:00 a.m.

Navigating Difficult Conversations: Building on Our Skills, Challenging Our Practice

Building on the learning, conversations, and experiences participants have already had in this area, we'll revisit key DEI concepts and language as a way to deepen the work. We'll then push beyond familiarity with the concepts to consider how they show up in real conversations and what it takes to apply them effectively. Participants will explore practical strategies for listening with curiosity, managing emotions, asking productive questions, addressing impact, and staying engaged when conversations become uncomfortable. The goal is not simply to learn more, but to challenge ourselves to use what we already know in ways that are more intentional, courageous, and effective.

Participants will then brainstorm challenging scenarios they encounter in their own workplaces and put their learning into practice through interactive role-plays. Together,



Independent Schools
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we'll test strategies, try different approaches, learn from one another, and build confidence in responding to real-world situations.

By the end of the session, participants will leave with a stronger shared language, practical tools for difficult conversations, and an opportunity to practice applying those tools in a supportive environment.

Kelly Bird, President, Making Space Consulting LLC

October 23 | 11:00 a.m.

Adjourned

Speakers

Martha Haakmat



Martha Haakmat is an experienced educator who has spent her 40-year career teaching and leading in New York City independent schools. She brings a depth of understanding and perspective to her work, having held various faculty and leadership positions in a wide variety of school communities. Coming from her most recent service as a head of school, Martha worked specifically on enrollment, marketing and finance in a changing admissions landscape, and she developed strategic planning expertise, which included diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) goal setting and ongoing systemic work. She has gathered and created tools and strategies for weaving DEI into policies, procedures and systems, as opposed to focusing on DEI reactively. She is now the Executive Director of Haakmat Consulting LLC, providing leadership coaching and support for DEI strategic planning for schools and other organizations.

Martha is a former lower, middle and upper school educator, Diversity Director and Middle School Head. She was a faculty member for the NAIS Institute for New Heads, has served as an independent school trustee, and has been a member of various committees for the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), the New York State Association of Independent Schools (NYSAIS), the Independent School Admission Association of Greater New York (ISAAGNY) and New York City Guild of Independent School Heads. She was also the founder and director of Educators for Growth and Empowerment (EDGE), a diversity consulting team with regional and national recognition.

Martha recently completed two terms of service on the Board of Trustees for NYSAIS and at The Brearley School. She is also a credentialed Montessori administrator.

Anthony Perdue

Anthony Teron Perdue (they/them), M.S.Ed., RYT-500 is an educator, wellness practitioner, and founder of Magic Mind Studio, a community-centered wellness initiative that uses mindfulness, restorative yoga, breathwork, and reflective dialogue to cultivate more sustainable ways of learning, leading, and being.

With a background in secondary education, social-emotional learning, Africana Studies, and mindfulness-based practices, Anthony's work explores the intersection of personal well-being and collective transformation. They have facilitated learning and wellness experiences for students, educators, community organizations, and institutions, with particular attention to creating affirming spaces for Black, Latiné, queer, and other historically marginalized communities.

Anthony holds a B.A. in History and Africana Studies from Goucher College and graduate degrees in Secondary Education from Johns Hopkins University and Social-Emotional Learning, Mindfulness, and Yoga from Woolf University. As a 500-hour certified yoga teacher, they bring contemplative practice into conversation with culturally responsive and liberatory approaches to education.

Through Magic Mind Studio, Anthony develops experiences that invite people to slow down, reconnect with themselves and one another, and consider how wellness can support more compassionate and sustainable communities. Their work is grounded in the belief that those committed to caring for and transforming their communities must also have practices that sustain them in that work.

Kelly Bird

Kelly Bird, EdD, has held a range of roles in independent schools, including classroom teacher, Director of Enrollment and Financial Aid, Lower School Principal, and Early Childhood Director. Currently, Kelly is the President of Making Space LLC, where she coaches administrators and consults with schools and organizations to build inclusive environments and foster creativity. She graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with her doctorate in School Leadership. Kelly is an Instructor for the Bank Street Continuing Education Program and Independent School Management.