

BOARD POLICY - THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF DAKAR

Feedback & Suggestions Submitted by Darnell Fine
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I. Wording in the 1006. Non-Discrimination Statement

Religion. Include “creed” as a parenthetical to “religion” to include belief systems that are not necessarily limited to religious ones.

Sex. In addition, I’d revise “sex” as “gender, gender expression.” The intention here is to refrain from discrimination against someone because of their social identity (i.e. gender) while someone’s sex would be used more in the medical field or when referring to the anatomy of someone’s reproductive system.

II. The Use of Non-Inclusive Language

“Her/His” and “He/She.” Throughout the policy document, “her/his” and “he/she” are used as generic pronouns. I suggest using the singular “they” instead because it is inclusive of all people (including nonbinary employees). “They” can refer to a generic person whose gender is not known and in this case not relevant to any particular situation or context.

Parents. Throughout the policy document, “parents” is often used to refer to students’ family members. Not everyone with guardianship over a student identifies as a “parent.” Instead, “guardian” or “caregiver” may represent more family-inclusive language.

III. Privileging Written Communication

There are numerous instances in the policy that show writing as the most valuable mode of communication in the organization. It is not only relied on to conduct business but also to formally document processes (i.e. 1010. Complaints, 1011. Communications, 2101.5 Teacher



Evaluations, etc.). While I don't have a recommendation to shift policies regarding written communication, I hope there are practices and procedures that involve non-written mediums to resolve conflicts or problems (as this may not be the most culturally relevant form of communication for community members). For instance, there is space to "make public comments" at the beginning of regular Board meetings (1011.3 Role of Parents). Such alternate ways of communicating beyond writing should also be considered in other areas where the written word is privileged. Furthermore, if there is a reliance on written documents, the policy should also indicate how often these written documents are reviewed and updated as the organization evolves.

IV. US-/American-centrism in Policies

Throughout the policy, American culture and power is preeminent. There are incidents where power of attorney would potentially be transferred to the U.S. Embassy's Administrative Officer (1012. Contingency Place for School Closure). The economic currency of paying employees in U.S. dollars and holding U.S. accounts also communicates social currency of who is important (1012.2 Board Obligations to Staff; 1012.3 Financial Responsibilities). This is also apparent in priority given in admissions policies to US citizens (4000.4). While it is noted that the U.S. government provided funding to the school (5320. U.S. Government Grants), the institution should critically examine how US-/American-centricism might reinforce internalized social dominance of its American community members as well as internalized inferiority of its non-American community members.

V. Potential Bias in Standards of Merit

Selection of Employees Based on Merit & Credentials. Section 3000 entitled "Selection" states that "professional staff members are employed solely on the basis of merit." This should give us



pause as standards of merit in international school hiring processes often rely on personal networks and personal references. In addition, standards of “merit” have historically and systematically favored white applicants in international school settings. There is a myth of meritocracy and we have to consider how power and privilege play a role in hiring processes. This also reinforces the idea that the demographics of those who are underrepresented in the school are not present due to their own personal failings or because they are unqualified, which disavows the structural biases at work in the hiring process. In addition, the valuing of credentials and the current employment criteria (i.e. educational background & experience in the same section and teaching credentials in section 3003) has the potential to reinforce hegemonic practices at the school. To make the selection process more equitable, require applicants to demonstrate knowledge and skills required to meet the needs of the culturally diverse community at ISD rather than relying solely on teaching credentials (which have been shown to privilege white applicants from the West).

Student Admissions. In section 4000.4 Priority Consideration for Student Admissions, students seen as having the “academic ability to succeed” are given priority at the institution. Placement tests carry a number of cultural and racial biases that could effectively sort out underrepresented and marginalized students as not being able to succeed academically. This could disproportionately impact students of color as placement tests and other metrics measuring academic ability often favor white students and white cultural values. To be more inclusive, admissions policies could be reformed so that they don’t sort and weed out students to one that embraces all students and the potential that they bring, including differently-abled students as well as English language learners.

VI. Potential Class Issues

Compensation Disparities Between Local and Overseas Hires. Throughout the policy document, it appears that local and overseas hires are afforded different compensation packages. It appears



that there is a very favorable compensation package for overseas hires, perhaps to attract what is perceived to be a talented staff; however, with such compensation differentials between overseas hires and local employees, I wonder how this might negatively impact the community and reinforce power dynamics (especially through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion). The overseas–local compensation disparity raises a number of questions regarding the commitment of DEI demonstrated not just in the hearts/minds of the community but also in the policies/practices of the institution.

3210.2 Certificate from Physician. Requiring a certificate from a physician may prove to be problematic if not everyone can afford the cost of getting one (i.e. transportation to the clinic, cost of the visit, etc.). I wonder if a climate survey were conducted, how many employees would express that getting a note from a physician would not be cost-effective for them. If so, I would explore making healthcare options more accessible and affordable for them before putting such a policy in place.

5400. Financial Aid. Consider providing full-tuition assistance to increase socioeconomic diversity within the school. In addition, how might the school provide assistance to students and families who may need to have field trips subsidized during financial difficulties, especially because these trips provide “added value” to student learning (4018. Field Trips).

VII. Discipline and Classroom Management

In section 2001 entitled “Director’s Responsibilities,” it is stated that the director would organize the school, principals, teachers, and other employees to be “democratic” and “cooperative” when engaging students in teaching and learning. I see this principle as running counter to section 3031.1 entitled “Classroom Management,” where teachers are responsible for maintaining “discipline through firm and friendly control.” This operates according to the belief that teachers and administrators should handle discipline and that rules for behavior should come from the



teacher or school rather than students. If truly democratic and cooperative in their disciplinary approaches, teachers would share control of the classroom with students. Teachers would help students understand how to care for themselves, so they do not need to be “managed” in the classroom. This should involve building democratic skills in students and working to develop their empathy for others and respect for themselves. Democratic decision-making would involve intentionally teaching students to assume the responsibilities and duties of citizens and to practice these skills in the classroom.

In section 3013.9 Student Discipline, I would interrogate the ideas of “fair” and “objective” because it may suggest a one-size-fits-all approach to disciplinary matters. Teachers should handle classroom discipline by assessing the unique needs of students in the classroom. This requires subjectivity and professional judgment at times, and we must remember that fair isn’t always equal when working with historically marginalized populations.

We must also remember and take into account how Black students in predominantly and historically white institutions are often over-disciplined. While this is not always intentional, we must be proactive in our disciplinary policies in protecting them. Disciplinary policies should not solely focus on shifting the behaviors of students but re-examining the norms of respectability and decorum that are naturalized in schools. In other words, there are times when our behavioral norms reflect an ethos of anti-Blackness which then manifests itself into school disciplinary issues when they are broken. We should ask if our discipline and classroom management are merely strategies to suppress Black culture and the autonomy/democratic voice of Black students.

VIII. Building Systems of Support Internally

3014. Tutoring. Tutoring is not a neutral, apolitical act. For those who can afford tutoring, it reinforces their class privilege, which is also intimately tied to literally all of other social



identities and systems of oppression. By outlining a tutoring policy, the institution expresses tacit agreement with a tutoring culture. A policy that is more equitable and responsive should be outlined related to the internal support the school offers. Before a student seeks tutoring outside of regular school hours, the following questions should be considered:

1. Are there any school-wide issues related to the area the student is requesting tutoring in?
2. If there are no school-wide issues, is there a small group of students that need to receive interventions related to this area?
3. What information is needed to decide how we might provide these students with the appropriate intervention at school?
4. Is the internal intervention working for each individual student receiving it?
5. Should we refer any of these students to tutoring after engaging in progressing monitoring for a sustained amount of time?

4014. Academic Probation. Furthermore, these same questions should be asked in regards to students being considered for academic probation. We must also critically reflect on whether there are classroom and school-wide variables at play that are causing students not to succeed academically. The deficit might not be with the student but rather with the teaching/pedagogy of the school's educators. First, we must rule out any classroom teaching issues before penalizing and placing the blame on students for their lack of academic success.

IX. 3026.1 Maternity Leave and 3026.2 Paternity Leave

There are disparities between the time “male” and “female employees” are allowed to take off for the birth of a child. There exists an opportunity within the institution's policies to encourage male employees to take an active role in caregiving responsibilities, which would be reinforced by giving equal paid time off. Disparities may reinforce notions that men play the role of



workers and women play the role of caregivers in heteronormative families. By expecting both parents in such family units to take an equal amount of time off, this disrupts such a notion.

X. 4006. Graduation Service Hours Requirement

While well-intentioned, the graduation service learning requirement, especially in the context of Africa, can potentially reinforce white saviorism. Community service, done in such tokenistic ways quantified by hours and incentivized as a graduation requirement, could prove problematic. Such initiatives traditionally come off as privileged students “saving” Black communities. Rather than focusing solely on giving back to communities that are under-resourced, a responsible global citizen would explore how communities in Africa were overexploited and left in the conditions that they were in as a result of racism and imperialism. This requirement must thereby also be inclusive of students engaging in antiracist work from within the communities they come from before engaging with communities through a lens of service learning.

XI. Absence of Proactive Bias Incident Policy

While harassment prevention policies were outlined in the policy document, I wonder if more intentional and proactive training could be embedded in regards to biased incidents. Upon admissions, hiring, and during their employment at the school, I suggest including a bias incident policy module that all community members and stakeholders have to complete. In addition, a task force could be put into place for community members to report incidents of bias at the school so that the school can respond proactively to community concerns before they are shared publicly.