

ST. ANNE'S AFFINITY GROUP HANDBOOK

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Revised September 2017

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ST. ANNE’S AFFINITY GROUP
HANDBOOK**

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AFFINITY GROUP OVERVIEW & EXPLANATION

Definition:

The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) defines an affinity group as "a bringing together of people who have something important in common (i.e., race, gender, profession...)."

Intention and Goal

As articulated in one of our school beliefs, "St. Anne's is committed to welcoming and respecting all forms of diversity. St. Anne's is inclusive in human and spiritual terms." Our belief statement also affirms, "St. Anne's is committed to cultivating a safe, healthy, and welcoming environment." Affinity groups will allow St. Anne's to further honor and fulfill these beliefs because they will create safe spaces for students, families, and faculty/staff to build community, engage in discussion, and feel seen and heard.

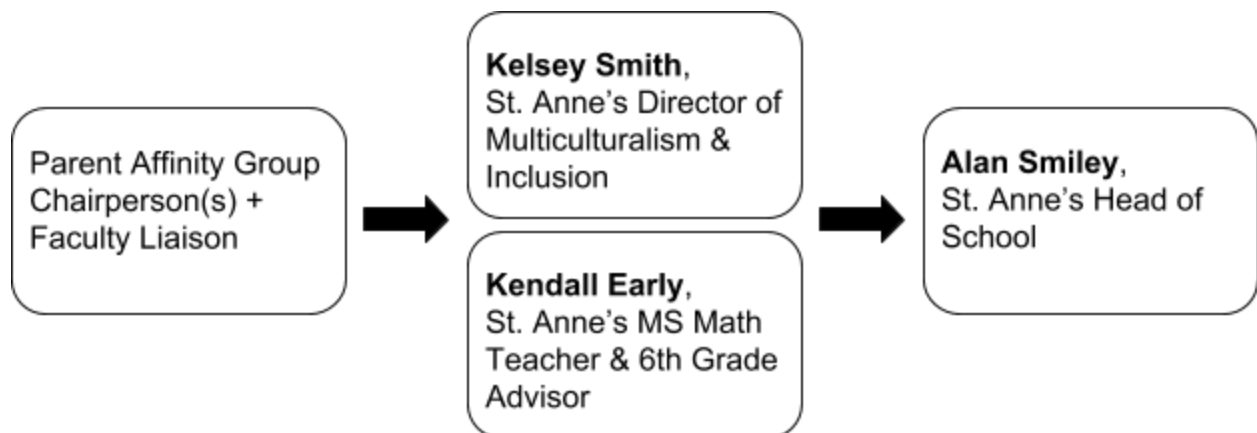
Mission

Affinity groups at St. Anne's provide an opportunity for students and parents with similar backgrounds and experiences to gather in a safe space where they can share pieces of their backgrounds and build common connections in their community. We hope that these opportunities help individuals to gain a deeper understanding of their own and others' stories. Our intent is to provide a safe forum for meaningful and personal dialogue that strengthens a sense of belonging in our community as well as ownership and pride regarding one's own identity.

AFFINITY GROUP LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Each affinity group will have a parent volunteer chairperson(s), and in all cases, a faculty liaison as well.

These affinity group coordinators will maintain communication with Kelsey Smith, the Director of Multiculturalism and Inclusion, as well as with Kendall Early.



GUIDELINES FOR AFFINITY GROUPS

MEETINGS

- In a group's first year, it will have at least three meetings (example: November, February, April). Once groups have established their own needs after the first year, they may determine their schedule of at least four meetings for the year (example: September, November, February, April).
- Affinity groups meet on campus in a school space which can be facilitated by our Director of Communications, Lucy Murphy.
- The chairperson(s) and faculty liaison work together to create the agenda for each meeting.

COMMUNICATION

Each individual affinity group chairperson(s) is responsible for maintaining communication with the Director of Multiculturalism and Inclusion, who will help with any questions that come up as well as give guidance for meetings. Chairperson(s) will also be in touch with Lucy Murphy regarding booking spaces for meetings and arranging refreshments from the school.

BUDGET

While these affinity groups should be self-sustaining, each group has an annual budget of \$300 to support activities, opportunities, and refreshments as needed. The use of St. Anne's facilities will not require fees.

MARKETING

Marketing options to the St. Anne's community include:

- The weekly FYI - contact Lucy Murphy
- The Multiculturalism and Inclusion page on the St. Anne's website
- Blog posts by Sumant Bhat or Deena Tarleton
- Using the support and resources of One St. Anne's (the Diversity Committee of the Board of Trustees)

POLICY

The administration values suggestions and feedback from affinity groups; however, school policies and curriculum will be set by the administration.

GROUND RULES FOR AFFINITY GROUPS

While each affinity group will add to this list according to their needs, the ground rules for all individual affinity group spaces begin as such:

- Assume good intentions.
- What is said here, stays here.
- Speak from the "I" perspective.
- What is learned here, leaves here.
- One voice at a time.
- Respect differences in experiences.
- Withhold judgment.
- Keep an open mind.
- Share air time.

LIST OF AFFINITY GROUPS

- **For Parents and Families**

- Parents of Students with Learning Differences
 - Jonell Loeppert- jloepfert@sorel.com
 - Scott Loeppert- sloepfert@columbia.com
 - Alaina Moore- alaina.rae.moore@gmail.com
 - Jenni Ernewein - jernewein@st-annes.org
 - Angela Moreira - amoreira@st-annes.org
- Parents of Students of Color
 - Nathaniel Ellison - nellison@mac.com
 - Sumant Bhat - sbhat@st-annes.org
- New Families
 - Lori Frank - lfrank@st-annes.org

- **For Students**

- Students of Color (available to Middle School students)
 - Kendall Early - kearly@st-annes.org
 - Sumant Bhat - sbhat@st-annes.org
 - Ana Dodson - adodson@st-annes.org

- **For Faculty**

- Faculty of Color
 - Kendall Early - kearly@st-annes.org
 - Sumant Bhat - sbhat@st-annes.org
- Faculty Parents Who Have St. Anne's Students
 - Angela Moreira - amoreira@st-annes.org
- New Faculty
 - Alan Smiley - asmiley@st-annes.org

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- What are affinity groups?
 - The term “affinity group” refers to a gathering of people who all share a similar identity. “First Grade” is a type of affinity group structured around age, and a school alumni group is another example. Although members of the group may share a common identity, such as gender or race, it does not mean that everyone in that group shares the same experience. Rather, participants recognize that their identity has an effect on the way they move through the world. Affinity groups enhance cross-cultural communication. They provide a space for reflection, dialogue, and support. Generally, participation in affinity groups is voluntary. The goal of affinity groups is to facilitate positive identity exploration and development towards the larger goal of creating an inclusive and thriving learning environment. These kinds of groups offer a time and space for empowerment of the individual and of the group within the greater community. (Based off of E. Denevi and M. Richards-- Diversity and Equity Best Practices 2013)
- How can my child or I be involved in conversations around diversity if there is not an affinity space for us?
 - If your interest lies in a topic specifically related to one of our affinity groups, please contact the chairperson(s) for that group for resources and guidance.
 - Attend a One St. Anne’s (Diversity Committee of the Board of Trustees) meeting. All are welcome to participate in these conversations and events. Meetings occur the first Monday of every month in the Archives Room from 5:30-7:00 p.m. Please contact the group chair, Sarah Mengshol (smengshol@gmail.com), for questions and more information.
 - Reach out to the Director of Multiculturalism and Inclusion for recommendations of books, videos, and other resources.
 - Students in 7th and 8th grade can attend the STAMP Conference.
 - All middle schoolers may attend the Diversity Lunch. Contact Sumant Bhat for more information.
- Do I have to attend all of the meetings for my affinity group?
 - No. You do not have to attend all meetings. Your presence and contributions are greatly appreciated as the meetings work with your schedule.
- How can I support my child’s involvement in the student group?
 - Reach out to the chairperson(s) of your student’s group for updates on topics discussed and resources that help support this dialogue and growth at home.
 - Listen. Your child will be learning new concepts and reflecting on their own identity and the identities of others. This is a vulnerable place of growth for all, and providing space and understanding for this process is important.
 - Ask questions. Ask your child what they are learning about and ask them how you can support them.

- What exactly happens in affinity groups?
 - Students and adults in school affinity groups use the time and space to share personal successes, to reflect on their own identity development, and to support each other in addressing issues that arise for members of their self-identified communities. A facilitator sets ground rules, creates an agenda, supports active involvement of all participants of the group, and poses questions to members of the group for discussion.
- Why are student affinity groups necessary?
 - Research has shown that, by the age of three, children are actively involved in sorting their world. At this early developmental stage, they are aware of differences as they engage in sorting blocks, animals, colors, people, etc. Therefore, to ensure that the noticing of difference does not turn into some kind of deficit, it is critical to support children in their awareness of each other's difference and to connect them positively to their own identity. Children are empowered to face and challenge prejudice and ignorance by the tools and experiences we give them. When educators and adults do not help young children develop healthy cultural identities, then our larger culture and their peers are ready to do it for us. We know that the personal exploration and resulting confidence that students develop in affinity groups are essential to supporting young children who will grow into happy, self-reliant, and healthy young adults.