

## **IDEA at Altamont (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access)**

Updated 10.20.20

Our work isn't starting; it is continuing. Altamont has listened. Altamont has learned. We have built a collaborative, safe space for work to be accelerated in the following priorities:

- Commit to creating incident reporting mechanisms
- Commit to improving the student handbook
- Commit to increasing BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) representation among faculty and administration
- Commit to developing an inclusive curriculum
- Commit to BIPOC representation among the student body
- Commit to create mentorship support for BIPOC students
- Commit to board, faculty and staff, student and parent training
- Board of Trustee Commitment to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access
- Alumni Association Commitment to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access
- Parents' Association Commitment to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access

### **Current State of Affairs**

Based on your feedback, we want to provide an online resource where we can update our community on our current state of affairs and answer questions that have been raised in our ongoing dialogue with our students, alumni, faculty, staff and families. It is our intention to keep this page updated with current information on our progress in meeting the IDEA goals that are ultimately established by the IDEA Task Force and its working groups. For ease of reference we have organized the topics to coincide with the IDEA priority items. We are providing this information as a source of baseline reference and a statement of our current state of affairs, but we certainly do not intend for it to indicate that we think the work in any of these areas is complete. Instead, we view it as a "growth chart" where our community can measure and track our progress. Please check back often!

### ***Student Handbook Language***

- Currently, our existing student handbook contains the following language:
  - The use of ethnic slurs, name-calling and profanity are not permitted.
  - Students and parents are prohibited from using profane, obscene, bigoted, or other type of offensive language or gestures on campus or at school-sponsored events.
  - The school is dedicated to fostering an environment that promotes kindness, acceptance, and embraces differences among individuals. Therefore, the school will not tolerate any type of harassment or bullying by a student, employee, or any third party (including vendors, contractors, donors, volunteers, parents, and visitors). Students should be aware that their off-campus behavior is also covered

under this policy, regardless of when and where the conduct occurred or who was affected by the student's inappropriate behavior.

- When the school administration becomes aware of harassment or bullying, the situation will be promptly investigated. Any student found to have violated this policy will be subject to disciplinary action, including dismissal from school for serious violations, even in the case of a single expression, act, or gesture.
- No adverse action will be taken against any person who makes a good faith report of harassment or bullying. Retaliation in any form against anyone for making a complaint under this policy or for participating in an investigation is strictly prohibited. Any retaliation should also be reported pursuant to this policy and is itself a cause for disciplinary action.
- Altamont's Heritage Panel, part of Altamont's C. Kyser Miree Ethical Leadership Center, is made up of student leaders who promote understanding and acceptance through discourse. These panelists facilitate two peer conversations by attending classes in each grade level to encourage diversity, equity and inclusion. Heritage panelists are also on call to facilitate discussions as needed. All Heritage panelist students (20+ students) participate annually in a two-day training.
- In June 2020, the student panelists led three virtual discussions with 53 Altamont students regarding the George Floyd tragedy. Discussions are continuing with opportunities offered during the school year, including discussions during the August leadership retreat and grade-level discussions. Additionally, in September, two dozen students met virtually to discuss individual stories about daily life as an African-American in 2020, the importance of leaning into uncomfortable conversations, ways to be a good ally, and ideas on how to build on Black History Month's academic offerings.
- Also, the entire 11<sup>th</sup> grade participates in training on these topics as a class.
- Service Corps is Altamont's hub for community service. Service Corps participants step out into the community with open hearts and open minds to assist people and causes in need of help. Through Altamont's global initiatives, students are exposed to cultural and global issues in our own backyard and around the world through lectures, films and focus groups. Friends of the World is a middle school arm of the Miree Center with a focus on global and environmental awareness.

### ***Diversity Among Faculty and Administration***

- Currently, Altamont's employee population is 20% Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC).
- Lisa Daniels, a faculty member, is completing an equity audit of Altamont as part of her master's program in education at American University. She will conduct research and will present her findings in fall 2021. The equity audit is a part of a milestone requirement in which Lisa will provide a rationale for this tool and the projected equity outcomes it should produce. The tool and informed consent documents are under review at the university. Steps for fall 2020 include (1) produce Institutional Review Board (IRB) informed consent forms to be approved by American University and signed by

Altamont participants; (2) conduct interviews with at least six Altamont school leaders for qualitative analysis; and (3) finalize equity audit to be approved by American University.

## ***Curriculum***

For the past several years, Altamont’s English and history departments have worked to craft global curricula that help students understand race, racism, and white supremacy and educate students about the histories, cultures, and ideas of BIPOC individuals and communities. As the work of the IDEA Task Force gets underway, we would like to offer a sense of where we are on this front. We view the below not as a list of accomplishments but instead as a beginning, a foundation for community conversations about ways we can continue to improve.

We see our curriculum as playing a vital role in helping all of Altamont’s students feel welcome, affirmed, and safe at school and to see their own experiences, histories, and cultures in the classroom. In this work, we are guided by consistent self-reflection, humility, and the idea that the best way to create an inclusive school that is honest about contemporary realities is to never assume that we have arrived at mastering these important ways of being.

Though all our academic departments are undertaking this process of self-assessment, we share updates on history and English first because these are the two disciplines that offer students the most consistent opportunities to understand a wide range of histories, literatures, and experiences.

In addition, the work of our English and history departments overlaps with our partnerships with local history and social justice organizations and reflects our commitment to making the programming of such institutions integral to the Altamont experience. We therefore also highlight below our work with two such organizations—The Equal Justice Initiative and The Jefferson County Memorial Project.

## **English**

The English Department began work on revising grade level reading lists in January 2020 to highlight a more diverse range of authors and experiences. Reading lists now include a minimum of 50% titles by BIPOC authors, and Upper School lists include current nonfiction titles such as Bryan Stevenson’s *Just Mercy*, Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*, and Ibram X. Kendi’s *How to be an Antiracist*.

Over the past several years, more texts by authors of color have been incorporated into the English curriculum. Those titles include but are not limited to the following works:

*The Poet X* – Elizabeth Acevedo  
*Things Fall Apart* – Chinua Achebe  
*Homegoing* – Yaa Gyasi  
*The God of Small Things* – Arundhati Roy  
*Native Son* – Richard Wright  
*Invisible Man* – Ralph Ellison  
*The House on Mango Street* – Sandra Cisneros  
*Beloved* – Toni Morrison  
*The Bluest Eye* – Toni Morrison  
*Fences* – August Wilson

*Salvage the Bones* – Jesmyn Ward

Seminar courses have been redesigned to allow seniors to explore a wider range of texts and topics. We regularly offer the following seminar options:

*Women Writers*  
*Eastern World Literature*  
*Southern Stories*  
*Russian Literature*  
*Contemporary Drama*

The Southern Stories course focuses on the key terms of *identity*, *culture*, and *place* and gives students the opportunity to read southern literary works in the context of a deep analysis of southern history. A primary goal of the course is to upend old narratives that use *southern* as a stand-in term for *white*. Students examine the work of black writers and historians alongside white authors, and the course centers on discussion about race, racism, white supremacy, and the experiences and cultures of black southerners. Units in this course include but are not limited to:

Confederate Monuments

Students examine the racist history of Confederate monuments, the Lost Cause, and its rewriting of southern history and commitment to white supremacy

Birmingham Civil Rights Movement

Students read the first volume of John Lewis’s graphic novel memoir *March* and go on a field trip to see a Birmingham redlining map from the 1920s, bomb shrapnel from Fred Shuttlesworth’s house at the Birmingham Public Library Archives, Shuttlesworth’s Bethel Baptist Church, the Gaston Hotel, and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute

In areas where canonical texts by white authors like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Moby Dick*, and *Heart of Darkness* are a part of the curriculum, they are taught and read in conjunction with critical articles that explore the problematic role/treatment of race in the works. For example, after reading *Huck Finn*, juniors then read the essays “Light Out, Huck, The Still Want to Sivilize You” by Michiko Kakutani and “Huck, Jim, and American Racial Discourse” by David L. Smith.

In AP American Literature, students study the works of Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne as examples of how nineteenth century Gothic literature reflects a subconscious dread and anxiety about confronting national “sins” of the past (slavery, Native American genocide, treatment of women, etc.)

In the middle grades, students read several coming of age novels that focus on the importance of “the journey.” Through curricular texts, these students are exposed to a diverse range of perspectives and experiences; with the help of our librarian, students are encouraged to select choice novels that highlight coming of age stories that are different from their own.

## **History**

In March 2020, the history department undertook a curricular review and changed two of its grade-level courses to offer students a more global, less Eurocentric history education. Our sixth-grade course has been changed from *U.S. History since 1877* to *America in the World*. In this topical course that focuses on the twentieth century, students study major events such as the Great Depression, World Wars I and II, and the Cold War from a global perspective rather than a solely American viewpoint. The Civil Rights

Movement is one of the course's major topics, and students engage in an extensive unit on the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham that culminates in a field trip to local sites.

Our tenth-grade history class has been changed from *Honors Europe and the Modern World* to *Modern World History*. This thematic course traces the development of the modern global order over the past five hundred years, examining the processes and patterns of exchange, conflict, and interchange that have made today's world.

Altamont students undertake extensive units on Black American history in courses that include *U.S. History since 1877* (fifth grade), *America in the World* (sixth grade), *Civics* (eighth grade), and *AP U.S. History* (eleventh grade). Topics covered in this combination of courses include but are not limited to the following:

- The slave trade, American slavery, and the cultures, traditions, and resistance movements of enslaved Black Americans
- The nineteenth-century abolition movement
- The experiences of enslaved and free Black Americans during the Civil War
- The role of Reconstruction in forging a legacy of white supremacy and racial violence
- Ways that World War I and World War II served as catalysts for coordinated Black resistance to white supremacy
- The Civil Rights Movement, particularly in Birmingham
- Black cultural practices that include religion, music, and visual art

For seniors, two history seminars—*The South and Civil Rights* and *Honors Contemporary Political Theory*—focus on Black history and theoretical frameworks for understanding individual and group identity. In *The South and Civil Rights*, students consider perspectives on the relationships southern states have with civil rights. With a primary focus on Alabama, students in this class engage with the work of Black foot soldiers, activists, artists, and researchers through canonical excerpts, new research, documentaries, classic movies, and music. In *Contemporary Political Theory*, students read the work of scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Angela Davis, and Frantz Fanon as part of a larger class project to consider relationships among identities such as race, sexuality, gender, and nationality.

The history department aims for students to obtain a global knowledge of history, both in terms of understanding the histories of people and communities throughout the world and considering the United States in a global perspective. Middle-school courses like *America in the World* and *Global Cultures and Geography* lay the foundation for this work, and students continue to take this approach in upper-school classes like *Ancient and Medieval Civilizations* and *Modern World History*. *AP U.S. History* at Altamont uses the novelist Chimamanda Adichie's concept of The Danger of a Single Story as its course theme and framework, which enables students to take an analytical approach to American history that helps them to learn about a multiplicity of American experiences and to understand the roots of American racism and white supremacy.

The history department regularly offers senior seminars that are likewise global and diverse in scope. These include the following:

*Latin American Studies*  
*World War I*  
*Contemporary Political Theory*  
*The South & Civil Rights*  
*Honors Twentieth-Century Europe* (an art history course)

## **The Equal Justice Initiative and The Jefferson County Memorial Project**

Over the course of the past five years, we have enhanced our school curriculum by visiting and partnering with two important local institutions—The Equal Justice Initiative and the Jefferson County Memorial Project.

### *The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI)*

- Altamont students were among the first in the country to participate in EJI's programming. In the summer of 2016 a group of rising seniors traveled to Montgomery to hear Bryan Stevenson speak at the EJI offices and then contribute to EJI's [Community Remembrance Project](#) by collecting soil from the site of an early-twentieth-century lynching in Shelby County.
- In 2017, Altamont's Heritage Panel students and faculty attended EJI's Peace and Justice Summit, which officially opened the [National Memorial for Peace and Justice](#) and [Legacy Museum](#). In addition to touring these sites, students attended panel discussions on topics such as race and education in American, criminal justice reform, and activism and identity.
- Each year the senior class takes a field trip EJI's memorial and museum after completing multiple lessons from the Jefferson County Memorial Project's curriculum. (Due to the Covid crisis, students will not take this field trip in the 2020-2021 school year.)

### *The Jefferson County Memorial Project (JCMP)*

- Altamont is a [JCMP Community Partner](#).
- Two faculty members served on JCMP's Educator Subcommittee, which was made up of public and private school teachers and administrators from across the county and produced JCMP's history and language arts [curricula](#) for area high school students. Assistant Head of School for Academics JP Hemingway co-chaired the committee. AP U.S. History Teacher and History Department Head Andrew Nelson also served on the committee and was the lead teacher in drafting the curriculum's history lesson plans.
- The JCMP curriculum teaches students the history of lynching and anti-lynching activism in Jefferson County and the powerful roles public memorials play in placemaking and collective memory. Altamont's students undertake the JCMP lessons in order to experience the EJI memorial with the appropriate historical context and background.
- In 2019, Matthew Mugweru, now a senior and a current task force member, created a project week trip centered around Birmingham for his Miree Center leadership project. Matthew's trip included visits to the 16th Street Baptist Church and Kelly Ingram Park. It also included a group impact activity that discusses stereotypes and racial identity and a walk on the Civil Rights March Route. Project week trips were canceled for 2020-21 due to the current COVID pandemic, but this trip will be proposed again for the 2021-22 academic year.

## ***Diversity Among the Student Body***

- Currently, Altamont's student body is made up of 29% BIPOC (16% Asian/Indian, 10% Black, 3% Hispanic).

- Altamont currently partners with Birmingham City Schools, all three local Montessori schools and other local independent schools. Open houses are also promoted through word of mouth, advertisements in local publications, local radio advertisement and the Altamont website.
- Altamont offers \$1,282,889 in financial aid and scholarships. Financial aid assistance ensures that qualified students, regardless of their ability to pay full tuition, have a realistic chance to enroll at Altamont. A third party called School & Students Services (SSS) gathers relevant information to ensure privacy when working through the financial aid process. Merit, endowed, and legacy scholarships attract students with exceptional academic ability and leadership skills.
- Of our student body (365 students), 25.8% received financial aid and 24.7% received scholarships for a total of 41%. Some families are receiving both financial aid and scholarship. The percentage of BIPOC students receiving financial assistance through financial aid and/or scholarship is 28.6%. A few of examples of scholarships are:
  - The Sarah Whiteside Legacy Scholarship (est. 2018) supports the tuition of a minimum of three exceptional, need-based students. This year, three students (two students are BIPOC) are receiving this prestigious scholarship, which is awarded to students who emulate Mrs. Whiteside and her values: students who inspire and care for others, who strive for excellence, who listen with respect, and who devote themselves to being and doing their best.
  - The Liberty National Scholarship (est. 2006) is offered exclusively to Black students who demonstrate the skills, aptitude, abilities, and desire to succeed at Altamont. This year, three students are receiving this scholarship.
  - Altamont is a partner school with Renaissance Scholarship Inc (RSI). The RSI mission is to attract and retain highly qualified students who need financial assistance with tuition. Altamont currently has 11 Renaissance scholars enrolled. RSI provides 50% of the tuition for these students while Altamont absorbs the remaining 50% of tuition. All 11 students currently receiving RSI funding are BIPOC.
- Through the Miree Center, Altamont continues to build relationships with the Birmingham City Schools. Specifically in the Birmingham City School system, Altamont currently has standing programs and/or partnerships with Birmingham Ed Foundation, EPIC Elementary and Hayes K-8 school. Additionally, Altamont partners with the following local organizations: AG Gaston Boys and Girls Club, Alabama Possible, Avondale Elementary, Children's Village, DISCO, Girls Inc, Girls on the Run, Girlspring, LETT, Maranathan Academy, Scrollworks, STAIR, and Woodlawn Foundation. We are active in our membership with the National Network of Schools in Partnership whose express mission is to create meaningful relationships between non-profits and independent, public and charter schools.

- Altamont is partnering with NewGen Peacebuilders (NGP), an award-winning peace education, training, and mentoring program that “equips people to build peace and repeat peace in their communities, countries, and the world.” NGP will deliver “Build Peace. Repeat the Peace: Metro Birmingham 2020-21,” where 150 select students from 15 Birmingham-area schools will work in cohorts to learn, grow, and develop peace service projects that will be part of a public celebration in May 2021.
- Altamont has allocated money and approved an anonymous climate survey to understand the community atmosphere.

### ***Mentor Diverse Students***

- In 2019, the Black Student Union (BSU) was formed by student leaders to support intragroup community development and provide the space to share knowledge and experiences as it relates to Black history and Black culture.
- Last year, the BSU planned the Black History Program and organized cultural lunches during Black History Month. Future initiatives include book discussions, community speakers and discussions, movie series and highlighting events that relate to the Black community. This year, Black History Month will be virtual.
- BSU sponsors are meeting with the BSU sponsor at Indian Springs School once a month to discuss opportunities, ideas and the potential for joint programming.
- Additionally, the BSU is exploring how to incorporate alumni who have volunteered to be members.
- Also, the Altamont Parent Association and the BSU are developing a group for parents of Black students.
- One of the goals of Altamont’s college counseling program is to provide options that will be a good fit for each student. HBCUs are firmly represented as valuable educational prospects and those institutions participate in virtual admission meetings with current Altamont students. All admission representatives are welcome from HBCUs and MSIs.
- In 2018, Altamont toured Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse College and Spelman College with students from Holy Family Cristo Rey while on a joint service trip to Atlanta.

### ***Training for faculty and staff, students and parents***

- This past school year, two faculty members and five students traveled to Seattle to attend the People of Color Conference and Student Diversity Leadership Conference, sponsored by the National Association of Independent Schools. The mission of this conference is to

provide a space for leadership, professional development and networking for people of color and allies of all backgrounds in independent schools. Upon their return, the students made presentations at a faculty/staff meeting and at a Board of Trustee meeting.

- In August 2020, all Altamont faculty and staff participated in mandatory implicit bias training. Additionally, faculty advisers participated in mandatory advisory training from the Stanley King Institute.
- In September 2020, some members of the Board of Trustees and the IDEA Task Force also participated in implicit bias training. The Board of Trustees will have additional training on implicit bias in November 2020.
- Currently, our student assistance counseling program places special emphasis on social justice, developing strategies to address social justice issues and working with diverse, underserved and oppressed populations. As a white, straight, cis-gender, female, Mrs. Lauren Garrett, our counselor, recognizes the privileges allowed her by these identities and believes it is her responsibility to continue to educate herself through professional development, personal growth and continuing education as she strives to be a culturally competent counselor.

#### ***Board of Trustees Commitment to IDEA***

- The board percentage is 18% BIPOC.
- The board nominates new members based on the expertise needed as identified by the governance committee. The nominations can be at-large community members, parents and/or alumni. We currently expect that at least two board positions will be open by July 2021. The nomination process opens in January of each year and the board welcomes submissions of indications of interests or other nominations. These indications and nominations may be sent directly to [boardoftrustees@altamontschool.org](mailto:boardoftrustees@altamontschool.org).
- The board recently formed an IDEA committee to work to ensure the board is focused on best IDEA practices for current operations and strategic planning. The board committee is chaired by Camille Underwood and Dottie Pak.
- With regard to reference to the term “headmaster,” since 2013 Altamont has used the term “head of school” in all circumstances.

#### ***Alumni Association Commitment to IDEA***

- The Alumni Association Board is 12% BIPOC. [Alumni Association bylaws](#) were last amended in 2014, and there is a commitment to review and update the bylaws this school year. The next Alumni Board meeting will take place on November 17 at 5:30 p.m., virtually. The goal of the Altamont Alumni Association is to create and foster a sense of

community among the alumni of the school, and to identify and meet specific needs of the school.

### ***IDEA Task Force***

- An IDEA Task Force has been established to oversee the development of IDEA at Altamont. The Task Force is meeting regularly and will publish summaries on Altamont's website. The current Task Force members are as follows:

- **Task Force Members (Voluntary Service)**

Uche Bean, Alumni Board, City of Birmingham DEI, Alum (Starting December 2020)

Katherine Berdy, Staff, Miree Center Director, Alum, Parent

Lisa Daniels, Faculty, Black Student Union

Jordan Davis, Alum

Chris Durst, Staff, Head of School

Liz Edwards, Community Volunteer, Parent, Board of Trustees Chair

JP Hemingway, Faculty, Assistant Head of School for Curriculum

Bryan Kariuki, Alum

Alex Melonas, Faculty

Steve Mitchell, Staff, Athletics Director, Black Student Union

Andrew Nelson, Faculty

Dottie Pak, Parent, Board of Trustees

Donald Robinson, Alumni Board President, Board of Trustees

Charlotte Russ, Staff, Advancement

Camille Underwood, Parent, Board of Trustees

Katisha Vance, Parent

Danielle Wattleton-Anderson, Faculty, Dean, Alum, Black Student Union

Laine Williams, Staff, Communication

#### Student Representatives:

Thomas Hitt, Student, Miree Center Global Initiatives, Heritage Panelist, Black Student Union

Matthew Mugweru, Student, SGA president, Black Student Union

Lauren Perry, Student, SGA, Black Student Union, Heritage Panelist