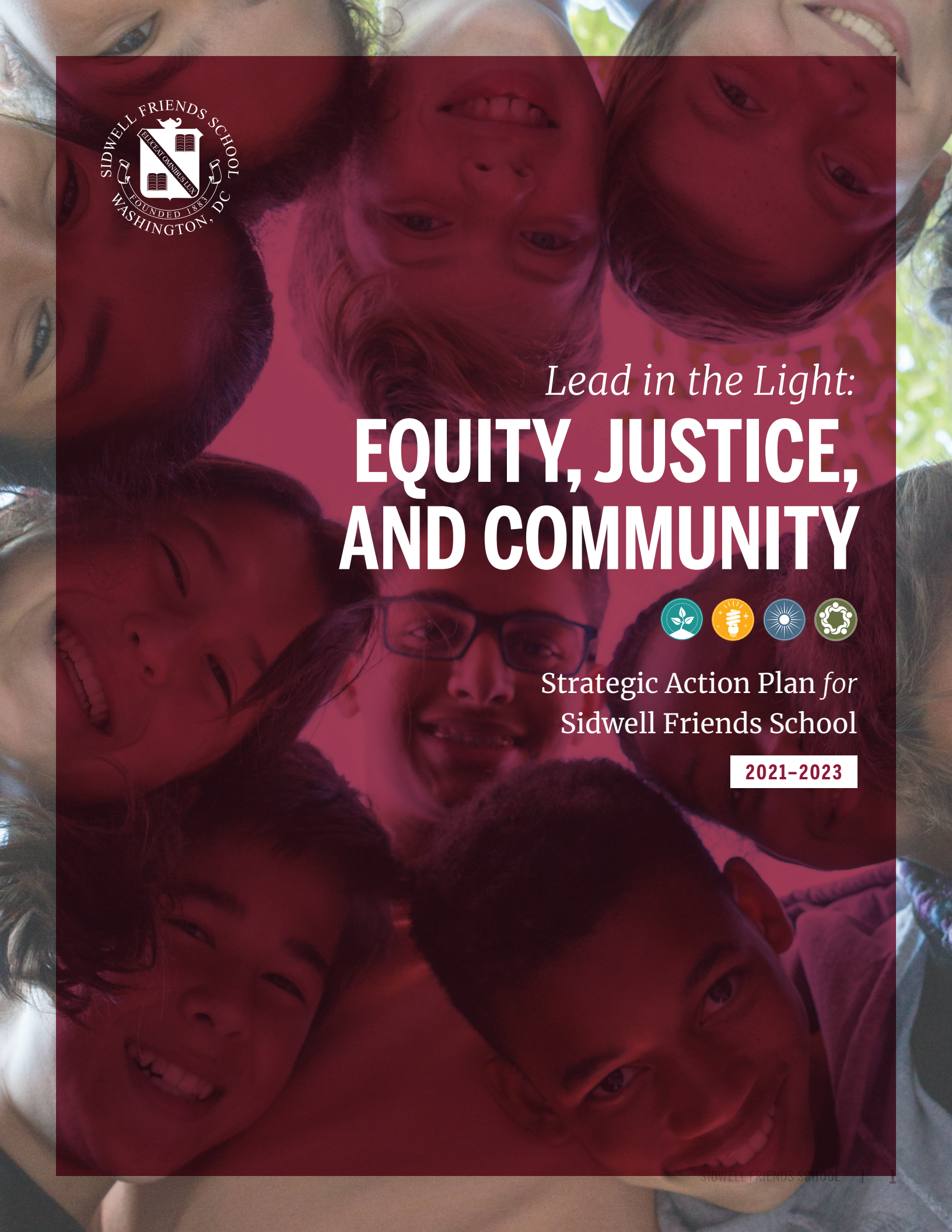

Lead in the Light:

EQUITY, JUSTICE, AND COMMUNITY

Strategic Action Plan *for* Sidwell Friends School

2021–2023

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DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Sidwell Friends School affirms the centrality of diversity and inclusion in all aspects of academic and campus life. Honoring a multiplicity of voices, we celebrate shared joys and address tensions productively. Together, we are guided by Quaker testimonies and seek to answer the question, "How do we nurture a sense of belonging in our community and demonstrate our commitment to a just world?"

BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Approved September 10, 2015

Preamble

As a Quaker school, the values of equity, justice, and community (EJC) are deeply woven into the Sidwell Friends educational mission. The School continually strives to build a community grounded in respect that is committed to pursuing truth and justice and to embracing equity in every aspect of its programs. As a community, the School aspires to be an environment where all students are fully seen and heard. To serve every student effectively is to nurture their intellectual, social, and spiritual growth through habits of mind and heart—to teach deep listening and self-reflection. The School encourages students to speak their truths and question assumptions, to demonstrate empathy and compassion, and to develop an enduring curiosity about and commitment to the world around them.

These values are essential to the School's mission, and yet the practice of them remains imperfect. Together, the Sidwell Friends community must resolve to reflect, learn, and act—to come closer to meeting the ideals we hold so dear.

In 2020/21, 54 percent of the student body and 38 percent of the faculty self-identified as people of color. However, the School did not always prioritize diversity. After the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the School was slow to enroll African Americans despite calls for integration from students, parents, faculty, and alumni. Sidwell Friends did not admit its first African American student, Jeffrey Mazique '70, until 1956, after which the School made minimal steps to be more inclusive. Following a movement in 1963 to integrate all three divisions, the School eventually graduated the first African American Upper School students in 1967. In the following decades, the School advanced its diversity efforts slowly. In 1986, the Board released a seminal report called "Diversity at The Sidwell Friends School," in which an ad hoc committee assessed policies, practices, and needed improvements in response to parents and students who pressed for reforms. Leaders like Bob Williams, Sidwell Friends' first Black senior administrator, ushered in change on campus—and in the world of education—paving the way for the creation of the 30-year-old Black Student Union

Production. Additional events and traditions sponsored by the Parents Association and student clubs, such as Lunar New Year, Día de los Muertos, Diwali, and the community iftar, have become important traditions that nurture inclusivity and cultural celebration.

Still, the School lacked a formal strategic agenda and a dedicated administrative structure to steward this mission-critical work. In 2019, Head of School Bryan Garman and the Sidwell Friends Board announced new equity and inclusion goals in *Lead in the Light: A Strategic Action Plan*, through which the School would establish the Center for Ethical Leadership and the Center for Teaching and Learning. In 2021, a member of the Board of Trustees endowed the director of Equity, Justice, and Community position with the intention of sustaining continuity and strategic direction for years to come. Natalie Randolph '98, the first person to hold the endowed directorship, began to assess the School's equity-, justice-, and community-building efforts when she joined the administration in 2019. As our nation witnessed more visible police brutality, acts of racism and xenophobia, and an increase in hate crimes, this work gained urgency.

Students and alumni called for justice, inviting the School to look inward, reflect on the student experience, and, amid political rancor, reckon with the nation's white-supremacist origins. We are grateful for these brave voices, which call on the School to acknowledge and rectify past wrongs, evaluate current practices and culture, and ensure that all community members are heard. By nurturing young people to become critical thinkers and compassionate citizens, Sidwell Friends can create a more equitable and just society, one student at a time.

Derived from focus groups and conversations that represent the student, parent, alumni, and employee perspectives, this action plan puts an institutional focus on creating and sustaining successful and adaptive EJC practices. In order to educate leaders and practice Quaker values, the School must examine its own history and current operations, and find ways to create greater equity for students. Doing so requires Sidwell Friends to dismantle unjust systems and structures, and to replace them with anti-racist, anti-discriminatory practices—practices that will demand focused effort and commitment.

The plan is centered first and foremost on the students: The School's mission is to promote their education, provide growth opportunities, and furnish the resources they need to excel. As we collect and assess data, we will eventually establish benchmarks to create standards and measure growth. This work will be far-reaching and aspirational, although these efforts will undoubtedly sometimes fall short. To keep steadfast to a commitment to EJC means we must constantly and actively listen and learn from the voices of our community. The School must remain forever dedicated to striving toward its goal: a student experience that inherently and explicitly allows every member of a pluralistic student body to feel at home, to develop a passion for learning, and to let their lives speak for equity and justice in all aspects of their lives.

How do we nurture a sense of belonging in our community and demonstrate our commitment to a just world?

Upon initial interviews with different community stakeholders, major areas of focus include:

- Recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty and staff;
- Evaluating curricula to ensure they reflect the diversity of the community;
- Establishing clear protocols and structures to address equity complaints and concerns for students and employees;
- Enhancing the growth and evaluation procedures, as well as training, for faculty and staff;
- Building structures of accountability and collaboration; and
- Reviewing policies, procedures, and systems through qualitative and quantitative data.

What does Sidwell Friends mean by EJC?

EQUITY

A state of being in which all members of a community have or receive what they need to be successful. This is not to be confused with "equality," which means all members have or receive the same thing. As the School strives for equity, it also strives to create an environment in which the diversity of perspectives and experiences, as well as the needs of all community members, are honored and supported. In order to effectively move toward equity, Sidwell Friends acknowledges that people have differential access to opportunity, and thus the School must create supports and programs that disrupt those systemic barriers.

JUSTICE

A collective, mutual, and ongoing quest to remove the barriers that create and maintain inequities.

COMMUNITY

A fellowship of people who share common beliefs, values, and goals, and who work in unity toward the growth, well-being, and mutual respect of all. As an educational community, Sidwell Friends works together to empower students as they learn to care about others, resolve and navigate conflicts, and cultivate their inner Light so they can bring it forth into the world.

"To empower young voices to speak their truths, to identify and articulate points of action, and most importantly, to follow through on the work required for change to take root are what we hope to accomplish. This work is central to the national dialogue."

—NATALIE RANDOLPH '98

Strategic Goal One:
Focus on Directly Supporting a Student-Centered Experience

Create and maintain a student-centered approach to all EJC work, increase student EJC programing and co-curricular experiences, and increase student collaboration in institutional planning.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What empowering programs should Sidwell Friends create to support equity in resources and experience?

How can the School best incorporate and leverage student voices?

What ways can Sidwell Friends keep the mission of the School at the forefront of its practice?

Strategic Goal Two:
Evaluate Current Structures and Systems, and Address Programmatic Gaps

Create a reflective, evaluative culture in which Sidwell Friends regularly and critically assesses institutional, divisional, and departmental policies, procedures, systems, structures, and curricula to identify and address those that may be harmful, inequitable, or indirectly cause inequities.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What structures and policies must the School evaluate?

What evaluative structures and systems must the School create?

What benchmarks are necessary to determine progress?

Strategic Goal Three:
Broaden the EJC Practice

Broaden EJC practice so that it encourages community members to seek and honor diverse voices, to practice inquiry and empathy, and to act with purpose and integrity.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How does Sidwell Friends actively engage all community members in EJC work?

How can the School differentiate experiences in order to meet people where they are?

What strategies will ensure that Sidwell Friends continues to learn and evolve?

Recent Progress and Identified Priority Actions

As the result of ongoing efforts by teachers and administrators alike, the following action steps are either in progress or have been identified as priorities. **Some actions support multiple goals and are labeled accordingly in the table.**

Student Programming

- **Strategic Goal One:** Focus on Directly Supporting a Student-Centered Experience
- **Strategic Goal Two:** Evaluate Structures and Systems to Address Programmatic Gaps
- **Strategic Goal Three:** Broaden EJC Practice

●	●	●	Lower School: Ensure that programming reflects more cultural diversity, backgrounds, and religions through assemblies and celebrations. Events include Diwali, Día de los Muertos, Black History Month, and Martin Luther King Day assemblies.
●	●	●	Lower School: Plan, research, and launch student affinity groups.
●	●	●	Lower School: Launch the AMAZE Library Program to support equity through language.
●	●	●	Middle School: Strive to enhance advisory and assembly programming and make it more reflective of cultural diversity.
●	●	●	Middle School: Incorporate broader world perspectives in the history curriculum.
●		●	Middle School: Work with affinity groups, and create an EJC student club.
●	●		Upper School: Jointly determine a regular schedule for meeting with student leadership groups.
●	●	●	Upper School: Work with students and administrators on supporting and refining programming for EJC Day, the Black Student Union Production, and other events.
●	●	●	Upper School: Work with affinity groups, and create an EJC student club.
●	●		Redefine the divisional EJC coordinator positions to prioritize student programs.

Employee Programming

● **Strategic Goal One:** Focus on Directly Supporting a Student-Centered Experience
● **Strategic Goal Two:** Evaluate Structures and Systems to Address Programmatic Gaps
● **Strategic Goal Three:** Broaden EJC Practice

●	●	●	Professional development: Continue with SEED training and mandatory EJC training; ensure that professional development days incorporate EJC values and practices.
●	●		Faculty evaluation: Initiate growth and evaluation procedure reviews (paused due to COVID-19).
●	●	●	Create affinity spaces and small-group and one-on-one engagements, including the Black Employee Collaborative.
●		●	Create a resource page in Canvas for EJC materials, such as resources for teaching anti-racism.
●	●	●	Establish the Señora Supervía Chair for Spanish and Latin American Studies and work to establish the African and African American Studies Chair.
●	●	●	Leverage the Howard University partnership in order to supplement and enhance the Center for Teaching and Learning and professional development.
●	●	●	Expand the relationship with the Howard University School of Education to sponsor student teachers and to develop possible future employees.

Broader Community Programming to Include Parents and/or Alumni

● **Strategic Goal One:** Focus on Directly Supporting a Student-Centered Experience
● **Strategic Goal Two:** Evaluate Structures and Systems to Address Programmatic Gaps
● **Strategic Goal Three:** Broaden EJC Practice

●	●	●	EJC Discussion Series: Invite and engage the broader community in various areas of discussion.
●	●	●	Work with the community's affinity, EJC, and Quaker Life committees.
●	●	●	Support community-based affinity group and parent initiatives, such as the Black Community Collaborative and the Parents Friendship Initiative.
●	●	●	Collect qualitative data through focus groups with community stakeholders.

Institutional Initiatives and Programming to Include Administration, the Board of Trustees, and Non-Academic Departments

● **Strategic Goal One:** Focus on Directly Supporting a Student-Centered Experience
● **Strategic Goal Two:** Evaluate Structures and Systems to Address Programmatic Gaps
● **Strategic Goal Three:** Broaden EJC Practice

●	●	●	Implement the Student First Framework across all divisions and departments.
●	●		Create and communicate a redefined administrative process and structure to receive, evaluate, address, and resolve complaints and concerns of equity with clearly communicated expectations for response and mitigation.
●	●		Create data-collection systems and protocols that target information necessary to answer essential questions.
●	●		Collect quantitative and qualitative data in order to answer essential questions.
●	●	●	Design and implement a regular schedule for equity and anti-racism training for administrators and trustees.
●	●	●	Evaluate and assess departmental practices and policies for equity using the Student First Framework as a guide, and make recommendations for change or adjustment.
●	●		Restart the curriculum review process.
●	●	●	Create and conduct focus groups and interviews to determine key factors that aid in the retention of employees of color in order to leverage strengths and strategize around weaknesses.
●	●		Continually train hiring committees throughout the School around equitable practices during the hiring process.
●	●	●	Continue to intentionally diversify hiring committees and standardize practices for screening and evaluating résumés across divisions and departments.
●	●	●	Broaden and expand recruitment and engagement efforts in order to attract larger applicant pools.

> "Our work is challenging, and we are confident that the administration and faculty will make meaningful and lasting change for our students and community. Our call for swift and meaningful action is rooted in Quaker values that inform the academic strengths of the School and shape our commitments to peace, community, integrity, and stewardship. Guided by the Light of justice, we will move forward seeking truth."
>
> —***MINUTE ON RACIAL JUSTICE***, BOARD OF TRUSTEES (July 24, 2020)

Priorities and Estimated Time Line

The following table shows the areas of priority as the School moves through this action plan.

SPRING SEMESTER 2021	SUMMER 2021	FALL SEMESTER 2021	WINTER 2021–2023
• Create data systems and protocols. • Collect qualitative and quantitative data. • Continue current programs. • Implement one new student program at each division.	• Begin data analysis. • Create an action-plan dashboard. • Make data-informed recommendations for 2021/22 programming.	• Review and revise action-plan goals based on data. • Continue existing programs. • Implement new programs.	• Continue work to establish the Center for Ethical Leadership and to support the Center for Teaching and Learning. • Continue to engage with Howard University faculty on programmatic explorations, teacher training, and collaborations. • Restart the evaluation cycle to assess progress.

Endowed Director of Equity, Justice, and Community Natalie Randolph '98

CENTER FOR ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

Today's students face unprecedented changes in technology, public health, science, and societal norms. The skills of inquiry, reflection, and ethical discernment—skills that Sidwell Friends has instilled for generations—are vital to students as they prepare to live in an increasingly complex world as engaged citizens.

The new Center for Ethical Leadership is designed to create leadership and civic-engagement opportunities for students to listen deeply and act ethically as they strive for a peaceful, just, and equitable world. A cross-divisional hub that falls under the purview of EJC work, the center will reimagine the scope of service learning at the School. To support students as they apply Quaker values and explore moral and ethical questions of the day, the center will help them find meaningful solutions to improve their School community and to engage with communities throughout the Capital Region.

CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teachers need the opportunity to grow professionally and to hone their craft for the 21st century. The new Center for Teaching and Learning will serve as a home and as a comprehensive resource for teachers across all divisions, offering essential tools and ongoing professional development opportunities.

- Teaching Workshops, Seminars, and Summer Institute: Race, Education, and Democracy Summer Conference for students and teachers (Howard University Partnership)
- Instructional Coaching Program
- Scholar/Artist-in-Residence Program
- Externship Program for Teachers
- Student-Teacher Practicum Program (Howard University Partnership)
- Education, Research, and Teaching Development Grants

PARTNERSHIP WITH HOWARD UNIVERSITY

In partnership with Howard University, the School will develop multiple projects spanning Howard's Professional Schools of Education, Law, and Divinity, and the Departments of African Studies and Afro-American Studies. The agreement, which is the first of its kind at both institutions, focuses on unique training opportunities for future teachers, culturally responsive teaching in schools, and an expansion of the dialogue on race, diversity, and democracy through a national conference for teachers and youth leaders.

Sidwell Friends

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