

# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Newsletter

SDLC Edition

---

## What is SDLC?

By: Nur Turner

SDLC is a student-led diversity conference created for marginalized private school students across the country. The conference is held in a new city every year and has a new theme every year. This year's theme was "Our, we the people". The conference is held over four days and there are daily activities held until 7 pm each day. This year's conference was held in San Antonio, Texas, and had amazing keynote speakers such as Amanda Ngyuen who proposed the Sexual Assault Survivors' Rights Act which passed in Congress. Every year SDLC has an amazing selection of faculty to ensure that students get the experience that they need from the conference. When attending the conference, it's expected that you will have uncomfortable conversations surrounding race, sexuality, gender, socio-economic status, etc. During select times of the day, students go to their family groups which are usually 40-50 people. In these family groups, there are times for reflection, journaling, peer interactions, and daily activities. Within these family groups, everyone creates their home groups of 8-10 people. This created group is meant to be diverse as possible, to get a multitude of perspectives and outlooks. Your home group is where many hard-hitting conversations happen, and it really is amazing to have this small group to have a set of people to look after you and for you to get to know as the conference goes on. I still am in contact with my home group today and I'm so thankful for SDLC to give me the opportunity of having this group of people to talk to daily.

## What to Expect as a First-Timer at SDLC

By: Maxwell Cundieff

Going into this conference, I wasn't sure what to expect. I didn't know what the conversation would feel like and I didn't know how I would feel walking out. I had a significant amount of knowledge regarding race but if I'm being honest, I wasn't as well versed in the other cultural identifiers. Walking into a space with people from all over the country for the very first time was extremely nerve-racking. I remember feeling very anxious and unsure of myself on the first day. Being in a giant space with people I had never seen before was something completely new to me.

Once everything started and I was in the room with everyone in my family group, I remember sitting and just staring at each other. We didn't know what to say to one another. However, as the conversations started and the early hours went by we started to become more comfortable and familiar with each other. We started to open up and it was easier to share our thoughts. I remember the instructors prompting us to share how we felt because many kids' lives didn't have safe places at their schools to speak freely. In my family group a lot of the kids similar to me, went to predominantly white schools in which their voices had been silenced and they weren't heard like they wanted to be. It was easy to relate and connect because we knew we weren't alone anymore. Once the conversation shifted and we started talking about the other ways people identified, I started to become silent. During the race conversations I had a lot to say but, now all of a sudden my voice faded. This was my time to learn rather than speak. I remember creating an identity molecule. The molecule consisted of different-sized pieces and inside each piece you put your various cultural identifiers. Once we shared, I remember being very surprised. Some things I had never considered important to myself and my everyday life were very important to others and vice versa. My biggest cultural identifier was race. However, my other cultural identifiers like gender, age, and socioeconomic status were the smallest. I remember this one kid in my family group who made his biggest cultural identifier age. I was taken aback by this because I wondered how age played such an important role in a 16-year-olds life. Upon talking to him and learning, I realized the immense burden he was tasked with as the oldest child of firstborn immigrants. He was the first of everything. He explained to me how much pressure he had on him. His only option was to do well and reach high. Attending Harvard and becoming a doctor was the only path his parents saw fit for him.



Dinner During SDLC



SDLC Participants This Year

# What to Expect as a First Timer at SDLC Continued

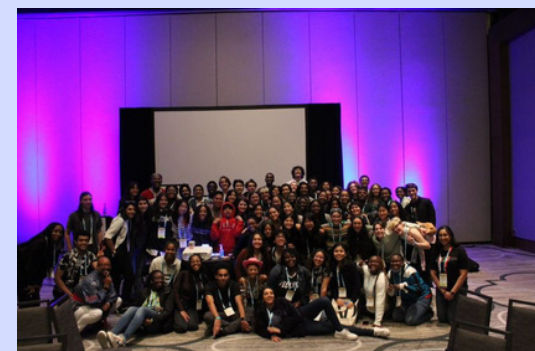
He continued to tell me that he only had this pressure because he was the first. His other siblings could live their lives however they wanted. His parents didn't have a path for them, they wanted them to do well but "well" meant a number of different things. I remember feeling bad for him and a little embarrassed. I felt embarrassed because I had never even thought about how age affected kids my age. As the conference continued, age kept coming up. I remember listening to people's stories, everyone had so much to say. Being quiet and listening to people allowed me to learn things I wouldn't have if I hadn't attended SDLC. Upon reflection, I realized I still have a lot to learn. I really feel like before SDLC only saw one lens of the world which was from my point of view of race. Now I see it from multiple perspectives. SDLC has really opened my eyes to caring ~~My family group identity~~ **My family group identity**, and I hope I will get the chance to attend next year.

## Year 2 Going to SDLC

By: Nur Turner

This is my second year attending SDLC. My family group was called Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Each family group was named after a historical person and this led our conversations and activities during the week. Last year, I was able to attend SDLC virtually, so I wasn't sure what to expect going my second time since this was my first time attending the conference in person. The first day I entered my family group, Rodney Glasgow, our facilitator told everyone to raise their hands for each year they have attended SDLC. I assumed that I would be one of few that had attended years prior. To my surprise everyone in the rooms raised their hands for going a year prior. And many others in the room raised their hands saying they had attended for three years, or that this was their fourth year attending. Rodney then told my group that our family group was for SDLC participants that had attended years prior, which immediately changed my experience. From already talking to other people that were attending SDLC this year, it felt like I was one of the only ones that had gone previous years. This made me feel more comfortable that there were other people that went through the same experiences that I did and were knowledgeable within diversity issues. Since my family group was for students that had gone previous years, we were told our workshops would be more advanced than the other family groups. When talking to other peers at SDLC, I caught on too many differences. I found out that all of the other family groups didn't have chairs in their rooms and everyone sat on the floor. I believe that this was because many of our activities were interactive and moving from group to group. A lot of the activities involved grouping those around us. For example, two people in my family group were told to group everyone in the room by socioeconomic status in five minutes or less silently. No one involved in the activity besides the group leaders knew what their groupings were until after the activity was over. When they revealed each group, the room gasped unanimously. We then debriefed how this activity made us feel, and if we expected to be put into the group we were put into. The two leaders talked about how for most people they just sent them to random groups because they felt bad grouping them. But when debriefing, what was interesting to me was that one person discussed how many of the minorities were placed in the upper middle class group, and how even though the leaders were trying to group randomly they could have actually had more intentionality when doing the activity. After the activity was over, we were still sitting in our groups and Rodney took two other SDLC participants from another family group and asked them to categorize us by socioeconomic status. The two participants got almost every single one group wrong. This showed me how people will often be quick to judge people based on their looks, race, and identity, but not truly know their status until actively asking them. One of my favorite activities during SDLC took place during the second to last day of the conference. We were told to play a card game silently in our family groups.

My family group>>>



We were given instructions for five minutes to go over it in our family group but the rules were taken from us before the game started. When a person won the round, they moved on to the next group, so a person that wasn't in our family group would enter after each round. This was very difficult for my family group to do, we had all gotten to know each other very well and we obviously wanted to play the game while talking. Something that my group benefited from was that one person in my family group already knew how to play, which made it easier for everyone to understand the rules. I remember one of the facilitators kept coming up to us to tell us that we had to be quiet during the activity. What came as a shock for my group, another person entered our game. They immediately started dealing out cards to everyone, but this was not how we played the game. People in my group began to feel frustrated at the person and I didn't want to add any more pressure onto the person so I assumed that they didn't know how to play. At the beginning of SDLC, we were all given notebooks to journals and were told to journal when we had journaling prompts. I thought that I could help the person out, and the next people to come to our group by writing down rules to the game we were playing so that they understood what we all knew about the game because we could not tell them the rules. This then made the experience much easier for everyone because we could continue the game while not having one person be behind on the rules. After the activity was over, we discussed what we thought the activity meant. One person in my group talked about how this made her think of systems of privilege, and not having the tools that a majority has in our society. This made me think about how going to a predominantly white school, I often feel underprivileged and know how it feels to not be embraced by others. I think that this shaped my way of thinking about this activity, and is definitely what led this activity to be the most impactful for me.

### **Faculty Members that Attended POCC**

**By: Nur Turner**

As students attend SDLC, faculty members attend POCC which is a conference specifically for teachers and administrators. It's important to know the teachers' experience as well as the student experience with diversity conferences. So, I decided to get the inside scoop on what teachers learned from POCC and what they want to bring back to Winchester.

#### **Mrs. Denlinger**

Shahnaz Denlinger has been teaching for 22 years now and describes herself as an architectural engineer by trade. She's been teaching at Winchester Thurston for three years, and this was her second year attending POCC but her first year attending in person. She described her time with POCC as quite an emotional experience. From teaching in the private and public school setting for many years, she never had the opportunity to focus on herself as a person of color. In her teaching environment, she always thought of herself as a teacher first, but with this experience, she was a person of color first and therefore felt very empowered.

At Winchester, there is a very small minority of Asian educators. She's very proud of being an educator, but never felt quite validated because she's in the minority. I asked Ms. Denlinger what experiences from SDLC would she want to implement in the classroom, because she talked about how she saw a lot of things that she wished that she as an educator would like to pursue. She believes it's important for students of any race to see teachers of different backgrounds, races, ethnicity, and religion. The diversity that we offer in our classroom allows students to feel like they don't have to fear the unknown, she says. Through teaching, she's seen students who are of mixed race, who are students of color, and who may not acknowledge their true selves. And that's important for her to represent that in the classroom. From the POCC experiences, she has felt more validated in making students feel more comfortable in the classroom. Since Ms. Denlinger attended POCC twice, once in person and once virtually, I asked her if she could talk about the experience and the differences between going in a virtual space versus in person. I asked, did she have a more positive experience in person or virtually. The first time she attended POCC was during COVID. It was her second year at Winchester and she felt like she needed to be present in the classroom because we were hybrid and there was a lot of classroom adjustment. Because of this, she didn't attend the full session.

## Faculty Members that Attended POCC Continued

During her first time at POCC, she limited how many sessions she went to because she wanted her presence to be seen in the classroom. Just seeing a person on a screen was very different from the extremely emotional experience of being in an entire large room with people who were of South East Asian descent who she resonated with. When she saw them physically she saw the emotions, the tears, and the struggles. She always tells students to pay attention to body language when looking at a person, in her own words, “it's not just looking at their face on a screen. It's the whole beam.” Overall, her time with POCC was emotional, draining, and empowering. It was a moment of acknowledging the struggles she has endured. It was also a time to recognize what can be done, to move students. She always thought her job was to educate the students, create good citizens after they leave, and make sure that they can tell what's right and what's wrong. She feels very different about her past beliefs after attending the conference. She still feels these things but also feels that students who have never felt empowered to acknowledge the person that they are, which might be mixed race, which might be Asian, which may be African American, or whatever they may be that don't have to fit into one box and that they should be proud of where they come from. She also felt like going to POCC allowed her to acknowledge that we're all immigrants to this country except for the indigenous people, either we've been forced here, or we've made the conscious decision to come here, but no one except for the indigenous people lived here before. This empowered her to teach a course called sacred ground. And it's through the beloved community initiative, which other educators had already participated in at the conference. This inspired her more because it has allowed her to overlap what she has learned through the beloved community initiative. She teaches the course so she has to learn the content. This allowed her to learn the true history of America, and with the conference, she felt her voice being heard which allowed her to teach with her full voice as a person of Asian descent.

### Ms. Jennings

The second faculty member I discussed POCC with was Ms. Jennings, this was her fifth year attending POCC. At POCC, she talked about half-day and full-day workshops that she attended before the actual conference began. Her favorite workshop was led by Tanisha Williams which was called “Do you see what I mean?”. The point of the workshop was to use visual tools to facilitate courageous conversations. This was a skill that she wanted to grow in. From the workshop, she walked away with tangible skills that she brought back to teachers at our school. When she first wanted to implement this in our school, she struggled because the initial workshop was from 8-5 pm. So she thought about what she could extract from the workshop so that they could put this into practice in the classroom. Since she was not an expert on visuals, she was learning what her skill level was to create her workshop. She focused on different techniques that she learned that she thought would be applicable in the spaces educators navigate in. In the workshop, she presented her work to the faculty so that they could build off of one another to create an interactive experience. The purpose was to simulate the best practice so that everyone could use the skills that they were practicing to create one of the takeaway products that Ms. Jennings modeled. When doing the workshop, Ms. Jennings thought about how students would be more vulnerable than faculty would be during this workshop. A strategy she used to create a more vulnerable space was sharing everything she did while facilitating this.



## **Faculty Members that Attended POCC Continued**

After describing how she has witnessed students being more vulnerable than adults, I asked her what workshops she would want students to participate in that she witnessed in POCC, knowing that students will be open in wanting to express themselves. She discussed a salsa workshop that she attended. This workshop stood out to her because the presenter talked about the power of social dances to create opportunities for connection among vastly different people. The presenter looked historically at the history of salsa and how it came from New York City, and how it brought people together across racial and cultural lines.

### **Dr. Brown**

The last faculty member I talked to that attended POCC was Dr. Jimyse Brown. She has been attending POCC for three years, two times virtually and one time in person. When talking about her experience with POCC, virtually and in person, she discusses how she had never been in a place where she felt like she belonged more. She had never seen so many black professionals in one area at one time ever in her life. Due to this immense population, she didn't feel like she had to put some sort of mask on in front of the people during the conference. This made her feel like she was seen in her full entirety, for who she was. When debriefing the difference between the workshops in person versus virtually, she found more workshops that she wanted to go to virtually. She thinks it may be possible that certain workshops were not at POCC due to how many rooms were available in the physical space. But this wasn't to say that she didn't enjoy the workshops that she attended in person. She just felt that there were more options due to the pretty much-unlimited zoom rooms available.

I asked her as the chair of city as our campus, what workshops stuck out to you from POCC that she would want to integrate into the Winchester community.

Her favorite workshop that she attended was called "Get Your Tokens Just Don't Be One". The workshop entailed knowing your worth and making sure that you are recognized for the work that you do. For her, the workshop represented not letting someone appropriate you due to your race and instead highlighting and recognizing the work that you have created. She believes this would be a great workshop that would hold significance to teachers that identify in minority groups. For students, although it wasn't a specific workshop that she attended, something that should be integrated more into our community would be visibility.

Since we have such a diverse population of students at Winchester, it's important to make sure that every student has the opportunity to be seen not only within the curriculum but within the experiences that the city as our campus provides for the community. She wants students to be able to have that feeling of celebrating various walks of life on and off campus. She indicated that students should feel this feeling every time they come to school or every time they're a part of the city our campus experiences.