



2022 SAIS DEI Institute

# You're the Diversity Practitioner ... Now What?

**Valaida Wise**

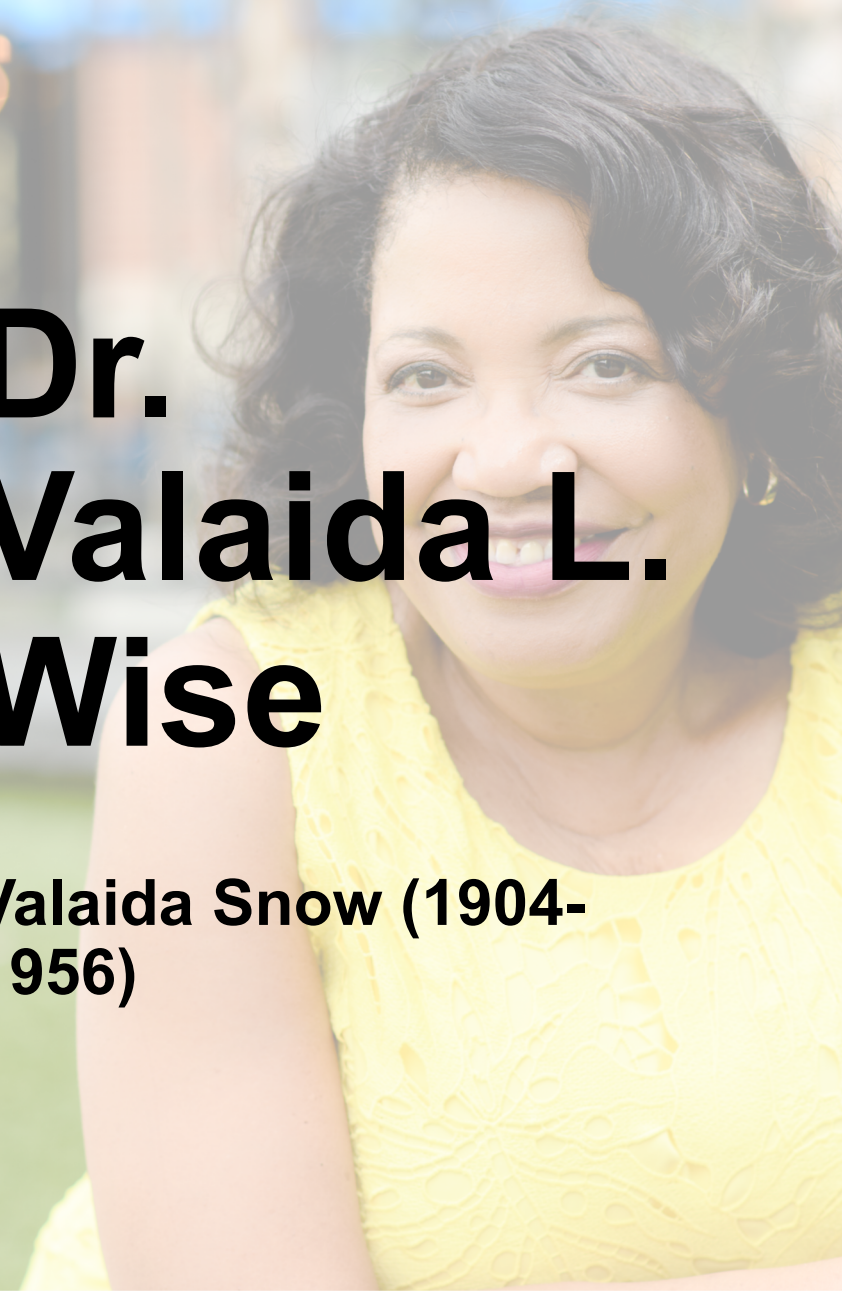


SERVING & ACCREDITING  
INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS



# **Dr. Valaida L. Wise**

**Valaida Snow (1904-  
1956)**







2020

# The Summer of Racial Awakening...



Job postings  
for the role of  
DEI  
Professional

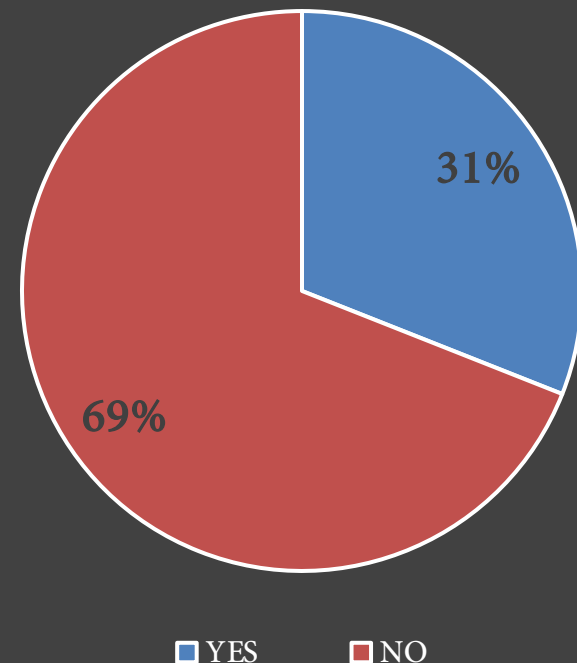
The number of job  
postings has increased  
by *over 100%*

(NAIS career center data 2020-2021)

# Percentage of Schools with DEI Professionals

In 2020-2021, of the 1,082 Independent schools that answered the question of whether an employee filled the role of diversity director at their school, only 31% (n=339) stated “yes.” (NAIS, 2020)

Percentage of schools with DEI professionals





# Sudipti Kumar

## ExploElevate

- Director of Research ExploElevate
- Interviewed a sample of DEI independent school professionals across the country.





# Research Questions



**What are the opportunities and challenges DEI practitioners at independent school's face?**



**How do schools support the DEI practitioner at the school?**

Three wooden figures are positioned on the left side of the slide. Two are white and one is red. They are standing on a white surface against a light blue background. The red figure is in the center, flanked by the two white figures.

# 3 Major Themes

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- Leadership and Support
- Environment and Culture
- Strategies and Tactics



# Whitney White

- Talent2025
- Diversity and Inclusion Competencies



# Leadership and Support: *Explicit*

*“Diversity professionals ... are too often caricatured as saviors. ... Their positions and work serve as absolution from the actual work necessary to achieve diversity and inclusion. The (DEI professional) is not a savior and should not be put in the position to act like one. The responsibility to establish clear goals, targets, timetables, and processes should not only predate the development of the position, it should be evenly distributed across... leadership.”*

– (THOMAS, 2020, Diversity Resistance in Organizations p. 173)

# Leadership and Support: *Explicit*

- DEI is central to the school's mission and vision.
  - Determine and document the school's "why"
  - Position DEI as a school imperative
- DEI professional is in a senior leadership position
- DEI committees at the board level
- DEI professional attends board meetings with open communication around resources and needed support



# Leadership and Support: *Implicit*

*“We (Diversity professionals) are in a unique position to witness and suffer through the pushback. We know what that looks like. And oftentimes, other departments see the benefits of the work that's done in the background by diversity professionals. And so of course, they're optimistic because they see results. We're in the back trying to make things happen. And, and we see the resistance and we know that we had to compromise. We had to take that baby step because they weren't ready for the step that was necessary. And so, we know how hard it is.”*

-Independent School Assistant Head of School for  
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

# Leadership and Support: *Implicit*

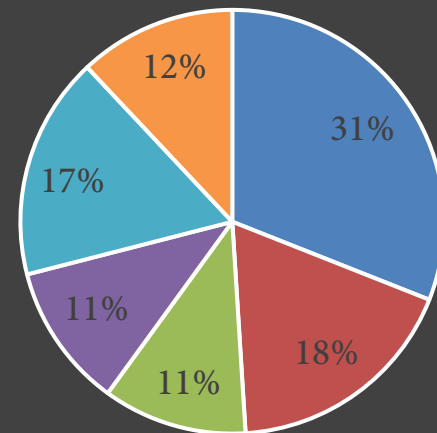
*“The best-attended parent meeting was a meeting to confront me. The head of school didn’t know what to do when everything went south. I was taken before the board. I thought I was on trial at one point because the vice-chair of the board treated me like I was on the witness stand.”*  
Independent School DEI professional

- Faith that leadership will support the DEI professional.
- The DEI professional can openly, safely and honestly share challenges
- DEI professionals is a key participant in all conversations pertinent to their scope of work.

# Leadership and Support

*“The role is the loneliest role there is. And I see folks leave because nobody wants to be lonely. There’s a difference between being alone and being lonely.” Independent School DEI professional*

How many people at your school are directly responsible for implementing DEI practices and policies?



■ No additional people ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 to 9 ■ 10+



*“Let me speak for myself. I know how hard it is to, to see change actually happen. And understanding that cultural change does not happen overnight. We can change our hiring processes. We can change our admissions processes in our school and, and it doesn't change the way in which they feel and that they are treated on the campus, right. That sense of a belonging and getting the entire school on board with that, and to shift the way they feel and think about belonging takes much longer than it does to make the processes. That's going to bring diversity. There's a difference between diversity and a sense of belonging.” Independent School DEI professional*

# Environment and Culture

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*“The work of the  
DEI professional is  
to be a disruptor in  
a space that is  
ready for  
disruption.”*



# Know Your Environment

- Conduct an audit of the organization's readiness to sit in discomfort and be pushed or challenged.
- Where are the organization's current DEIJ efforts sitting?
- Mostly in programmatic change?
- Have there been efforts to move to institutional change?



The majority of DEI professionals are **people of color** who experience personal and professional challenges working to change the system in predominantly White institutions.





## Importance of Self Care

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- Take part in self-care
- Ensure that you have an opportunity to disconnect
- Build connections

*How do you take care of  
yourself?*



# Strategies and Tactics

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- The work is multifaceted, complex, and sometimes hidden to the rest of the school community
- DEI professionals have a clearly defined skill-set, and they are also learners on this journey





## The Expanding Role of the DEI Professional

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Subject matter expert  
Child development expert  
Change management expert  
Expert in mental health and wellbeing  
Data Analytics Expert  
Communications Expert  
Crisis Response

What other roles do you  
have...?



*“There is a limit to an individual’s capacity for the broad breadth of expectations that we have for DEI work. To expect any one individual to have all competencies in all areas is an unreasonable expectation. Instead, the organization should collectively have knowledge, skills, and a strategy around DEI competencies.”*

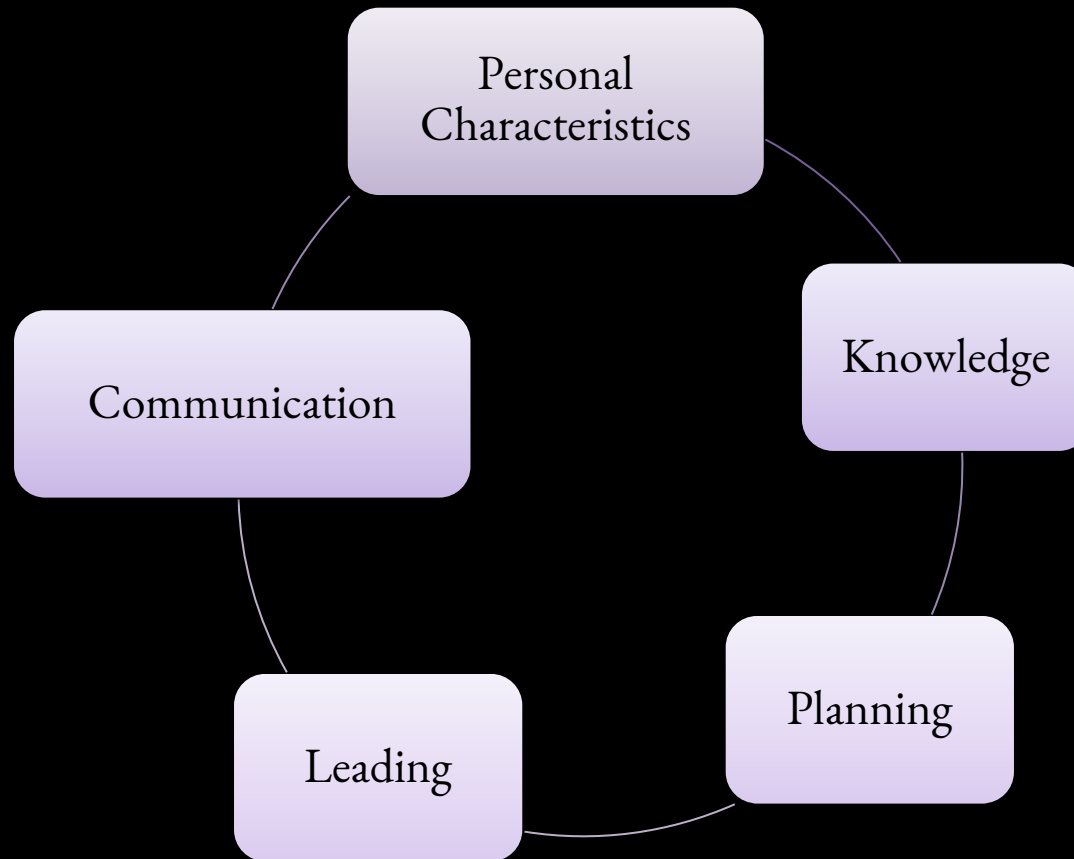
– JESSE M. BERNAL, PH.D. Vice President for  
Inclusion and Equity & Executive Associate for  
Presidential Initiatives, Grand Valley State University





# Five Key competencies for DEI professionals

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# The DEI Competencies

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- The competencies considered most important can vary, based on:
    - the stage of the DEI journey for the individual DEI leader (professional, personal, educational, or motivational)
    - the DEI officers' role (title, authority, and influence)
    - the stage of the DEI journey for the organization
    - how success is defined by the organization
    - the systems that hold DEI officers accountable
    - if a sustainability plan has been developed

# Personal Characteristics

*“Many approach DEI as a subject matter. It’s a matter of not just the mind but the heart. A person needs a sincere desire to want to better understand others’ experiences and to impact systems that fail to meet the needs of different groups.”*

– RHAE-ANN BOOKER, PH.D., Vice President of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, University of Michigan

# Personal Characteristics

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- **Self-aware**
  - Understand your own cultural influences, values, identities, triggers, dimensions of diversity and how you are situated within the organization, community, and world
- **Resilience**
  - Continuously move forward while encountering obstacles and lack of support
- **Authenticity**
  - Offer genuine and trustworthy leadership
- **Change Agent**
  - Spark or accelerate change within your organization
- **Relational**



# KNOWLEDGE

*Having foundational understanding of DEI  
and a commitment to continuous learning.*

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*“The (DEI professional) must be a  
scholar-practitioner who can  
research, write, and speak about  
the intersectionality of ...DEI.”*

– B. AFENI MCNEELY COBHAM, PH.D., Chief Equity and  
Inclusion Officer at Grand Rapids Community College





# Knowledge

- Develop content knowledge that is critical to effective DEI strategies
- Create personal knowledge networks
- Research DEI standards and best practices
- A willingness to engage in continued learning is essential as the DEI field is constantly evolving with language, research, and practice.

# PLANNING

*The ability to envision an ideal future state and develop a plan to achieve it.*





# Planning

- Integrating a DEI vision into an organization's overall strategic plan requires collaboration with and support from leadership.
- Effective DEI leaders should be able to define metrics and design, launch, and manage programs.
- Use data to assess the school's current state and understand where the school stands relative to its DEI goals
- Design, implement, and manage internal DEI programs and initiatives
- Create a shared D&I culture across the school
- Planning The ability to envision an ideal future state and develop a plan to achieve it.





**Leading:** The ability to influence people and systems to move organizations forward.

*“When leading for equity, belonging and inclusion, we can’t just focus on being responsive. Our leadership has to see beyond current urgent issues. Our concern must include dismantling the policies and systems that breed inequities. We must build structures, systems, policies, and protocols that foster a new way of relating and valuing others.”*

– BRANDY LOVELADY MITCHELL, ED.D., Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Kent Intermediate School District



# Leading

- Leading organizational change requires
  - professional acumen,
  - political savvy and
  - the ability to navigate the complex organizational structure of independent schools.
  - vision
  - strategy
  - the ability to discern when to inquire, advocate, drive, or resolve more decisively
- It also involves the kind of influence that can
  - shift mindsets,
  - solve problems,
  - disrupt programs, practices, and systems to move the school forward.

**Communication:** The ability to receive and share information in a number of formats.

*“It’s critical for chief diversity officers to be able to **connect the dots** for others within their organization about how diversity, equity, and inclusion are related to the overall company mission as well as their specific roles.”*

– LATOYA BOOKER, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Davenport University

# Communication

## Communicate

**Effectively communicate** with tact and professionalism to multiple internal and external audiences

## Articulate

**Articulate a compelling vision,** business case and moral case for diversity and inclusion as an organizational imperative

## Facilitate

**Facilitate bold and difficult conversations** about race and other dimensions of diversity that also create a brave place for people to be pushed beyond their comfort zones, respectfully challenge, and disagree

## Use

**Use storytelling** and other creative approaches to connect, inspire, educate, and influence



The background of the image is a dark teal color, overlaid with a repeating pattern of speech bubbles. Each speech bubble is a different shade of brown, tan, or grey, and contains a large, dark blue question mark. The speech bubbles are scattered across the entire frame, creating a textured, thought-provoking background.

*Things to  
think about?*

# Make your presence known

*Don't assume that people know what  
your role entails and how it benefits  
the school.*

# Find Allies and Champions

- DEI cannot be the work of one single person, or even a single team within a school.
- Make the connections and develop the relationships-
  - “Gather Big Trees.”



Assess where the  
Organization is  
on its DEI  
Journey







## Create a Vision and Secure Necessary Resources

To make a significant impact at your school, you'll need to work with leaders and team members to create a vision for success and secure the appropriate resource.

Collect and analyze your school's data, prioritize having conversations with your school's leadership team around the vision for DEI with key leaders and team members.”

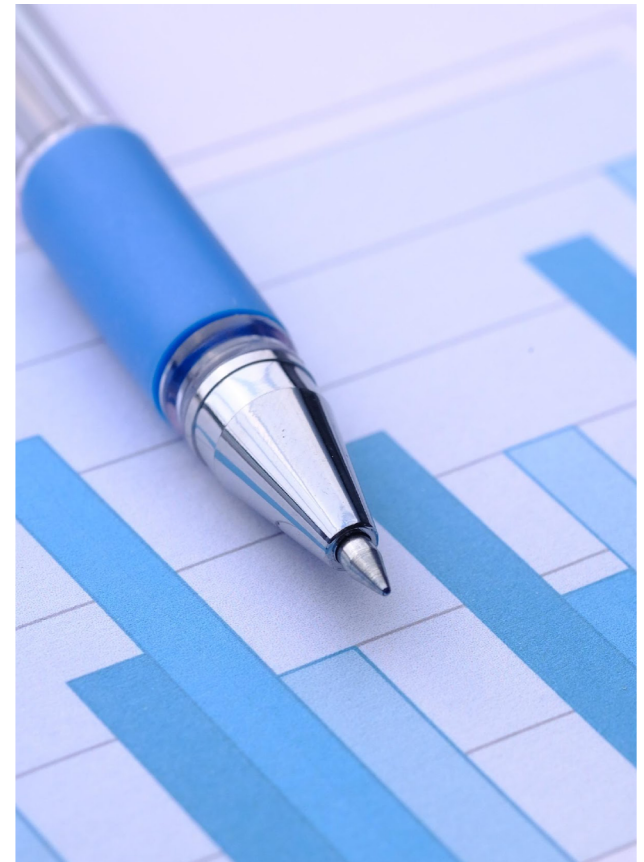
# Collect Data & Track Progress

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*“It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data”  
Sherlock Holmes.*

- **Collect and Analyze data that is**
  - relevant to your school.
  - Data will paint a picture of the organization’s strengths and weaknesses.
  - help you identify pain points where you might be able to make the greatest impact and contribution.
  - If your organization doesn’t have much data to begin with, then make collecting it a top priority for your first set of quarterly goals.
  - Make sure to collect both quantitative and qualitative data

*“What gets measured gets done.” These words ring very true in the DEI space*



“By nature of our role, we are the truth-tellers in this work, right? ...because of the nature of our work we bring that critical lens every day to the work, which is a little bit different than some of the other roles, right?” Independent School DEI Professional



Thank you  
for being  
the  
Truth-tellers!





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THANK YOU