



May 11, 2021

To: The Association of Independent Schools in New England (AISNE) and the New England Association of Schools & Colleges (NEASC)

In the spirit of continuous improvement and with the intention of staying at the forefront of scholarship and leadership, we are writing to introduce ourselves and to highlight growing concerns about the direction of education among New England schools.

Even prior to our formal launch, Parents United (www.parentsunited.org) has grown to be a group of hundreds of dedicated, involved, and informed parents devoted to ensuring our children are free to develop their critical thinking skills within an educational environment steeped in diversity of thought.

As the public discourse erodes and the complexity of life increases, we believe that diverse viewpoints in K-12 education is more important than ever. Critical thinking, logic, and other essential cognitive skills develop during childhood, and it is vital that our children learn to engage in thoughtful and respectful conversations. One cannot truly develop their own perspective until they understand additional viewpoints.

In consultation with FIRE (The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education), a non-partisan civil rights organization, we have witnessed the growing threats to free and open discourse on America's campuses, and the perilous implications of academic censorship, regardless of good intentions.

What has been happening on college campuses for years is now trickling down to K-12 schools. We worry that these accelerating trends pose a considerable and demonstrable threat to the quality education we wish to provide for our children.

We believe that accreditors must take a stand and help defend the "right to disagree." This year, more than ever, we have seen through our own eyes (and through virtual learning) the chilling of speech.

As the accrediting agencies for our children's schools, you play an integral, overarching role in helping schools uphold their missions, which for many include the academic excellence for which we, as parents, sacrifice so much of our time and financial resources. AISNE, for example, highlights its commitment to diversity, but its words, actions, speakers, and professional development since the 2020 school year seem to be narrowly focused and politically charged. This leaves little room for free inquiry.

We are asking AISNE and NEASC to uphold the Core Standards Mission (set by ICAISA) by taking a principled stand in favor of free speech and to encourage diversity of thought. There are numerous ways to accomplish this important work, but we will suggest two:

1. As part of the accreditation process, schools must create, promote, and honor their own versions of the Chicago Statement (see excerpt below), which will compel institutions to protect the free expression rights of students, faculty, staff, and parents. The Chicago Statement is a free speech policy statement produced by the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago in January 2015.

“Because “the school” is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, it guarantees all members of the “school” community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn [I]t is not the proper role of the “school” to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive.”

— Excerpt from the Chicago Statement

2. Schools must commit to engaging presenters who represent diverse viewpoints to speak to faculty, parents, and students. Our students and educators need to hear from a variety of voices to provide much-needed balance. Schools need to prioritize professional development in this area so teachers have the tools to facilitate class discussions and promote critical thinking.

We are calling on accreditors to take reasonable steps to guarantee that schools live up to their missions, fulfill their expectations and promises to families, and ensure that their faculty and staff honor high standards of professional ethics.

AISNE has used its platform to advance and promote DEI work; the natural next step is for accreditors to complement this effort by vigorously promoting diversity of thought.

As many schools prepare to evaluate curriculum this summer, this work takes on a greater sense of urgency. We look forward to discussing this at your earliest convenience and can be reached at ashley@parentsunited.org.

Signed,



Ashley Jacobs

Parents United

