

# Verner Center for Early Learning

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Commitment Statement



Verner's mission is to deliver high-quality educational and relationship-based learning environments from prenatal to pre-kindergarten where every individual (child, family, staff, and faculty member) is valued and respected. Our programming is comprehensive, culturally meaningful, resiliency-focused, trauma-responsive, and child- and family-centered. We connect with families and early education partners to provide integrated services. We support family wellbeing throughout a child's development, so our whole community can lead healthy, happy, and productive lives. We are called by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the federal Office of Head Start (OHS), members of the Verner community, and principles of morality and ethics to pursue the advancement of equity in early childhood education. Here is more information about Verner's commitment to advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in our work and in our community:

### *What These Words Mean to Us*

The following definitions come from NAEYC's Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education [Position Statement](#):

**Diversity:** “Variation among individuals, as well as within and across groups of individuals, in terms of their backgrounds and lived experiences. These experiences are related to social identities, including race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, social and economic status, religion, ability status, and country of origin. The terms diverse and diversity are sometimes used as euphemisms for non-white. NAEYC specifically rejects this usage, which implies that whiteness is the norm against which diversity is defined.”

**Equity:** “The state that would be achieved if individuals fared the same way in society regardless of race, gender, class, language, disability, or any other social or cultural characteristic. In practice, equity means all children and families receive necessary support in a timely fashion so they can develop their full intellectual, social, and physical potential.

*Equity is not the same as equality. Equal treatment given to individuals at unequal starting points is inequitable. Instead of equal treatment, NAEYC aims for equal opportunity. This requires considering individuals’ and groups’ starting points, then distributing resources equitably (not equally) to meet needs. Attempting to achieve equality of opportunity without considering historic and present inequities is ineffective, unjust, and unfair.”*

*Equality is giving everyone the same thing. Equity is giving everyone what they need to succeed.*

**Inclusion:** “Embodied by the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and their family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to help them reach their full potential. Although the traditional focus of inclusion has been on addressing the exclusion of children with disabilities, full inclusion seeks to promote justice by ensuring equitable participation of all historically marginalized children.”

**Belonging:** Merriam-Webster defines belonging as a “close or intimate relationship.” At Verner, we strive to cultivate an environment in which children, families, and employees from all socio-economic levels, ability levels, races, cultures, family types, and backgrounds feel valued, respected, and loved.

### *What We Know*

- We exist within systems of white supremacy and institutionalized racism and oppression that have benefited white individuals and communities for centuries.

- There is no denying the history of the United States and how that history has shaped the way our society operates today.
- Societal expectations of professionalism and traditional work culture are Euro-centric and model plantation structures that force false responsibilities. People are judged and praised by the amount of work that is produced even if it is due to harmful, unhealthy, and unrealistic expectations.
- We know that individuals who are not white, who are differently abled, who are not cis gendered, and who are not straight have always played major roles in shaping the advancement of our country and the world, yet these individuals are marginalized and oppressed on a daily basis in many different ways.
- **Equity requires continuous, thoughtful, and intentional work.**

### *What We Believe*

- We believe in the humanity of *every* individual.
- We believe that every person has the right to be valued and treated with integrity.
- We believe that any action that is not in service of dismantling systems of oppression is in service of upholding them.
- We believe children from all socio-economic levels, ability levels, races, cultures, family types, and backgrounds need and deserve high-quality, comprehensive early care and education;

- We believe the most effective education of a young child requires the active partnership of family, community, and school.
- We believe it is our purpose to nurture the development of the whole child.
- We believe it is our obligation, as leaders in the profession, to model best practices for others in order to raise the quality of early care and education for children and families within and beyond the Verner community.

### *What We Will Do*

- We will cultivate inclusive, culturally-responsive environments in which all people see themselves reflected.
- We will use an anti-bias, anti-racist curriculum.
- We will strive, every day, to develop an awareness of the systems of white supremacy and oppression in which we operate.
- We will identify ways that we can work with other early childhood providers and organizations to dismantle those practices and policies that uphold such systems.

### *Our Commitment*

- Verner is committed to the values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

- We are committed to becoming an anti-racist organization.
- Verner is committed to providing all staff and faculty with opportunities for training and reflection in order to develop and implement anti-racist and anti-bias practices.
- Verner is committed to making our mission – “fostering holistic learning environments where young children and families thrive” – a reality every day, in every classroom, every center, every home visit, and every interaction with a child, family, or community partner.

### *Racial Equity Pledge*

*As a member of the Verner Center for Early Learning Community:*

- *I pledge to continually work towards Racial Equity.*
- *I pledge to show up with integrity, compassion, and kindness to all members of the Verner Community.*
- *I pledge to confront racism where I find it.*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_