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With new hire, Providence Day School builds on its commitment to diversity

As independent schools and universities are being asked to confront past racism, PDS has created a new position that will work closely with alumni and current students of color and their families.



Jana Dorsey (Photo: Providence Day School)



Jana Dorsey had followed her passion into politics, helping Pete Buttigieg transform from an Indiana mayor to a national political figure while working for his 2020 presidential campaign. But within weeks last March, he had dropped out of the presidential race and the country entered a shutdown to combat Covid-19.

Just as Dorsey was wondering “what’s next?” Providence Day School came calling. The Charlotte-based independent TK-12 school gave her the chance to devote her energy and experience toward the new cause of helping an independent school pursue equity, inclusion, and a more just world.

Dorsey wrapped up her two positions on the Buttigieg (Boot-Edge-Edge) campaign in Nevada (Deputy Operations Director and People Operations Associate) before returning home to South Bend, Indiana. Soon, Dr. Nadia Johnson, Director of Equity & Inclusion at Providence Day School, was calling to let her know about a new position being created: Associate Director of Equity & Inclusion Outreach. Dorsey started in the role September 8th.

“I think it speaks volumes that Providence Day School established the Office of Equity and Inclusion more than 15 years ago,” Dorsey says. “More importantly, they are making sure to grow the team. The importance of having a team and not having to do this alone is huge. We can unpack together and build and brainstorm together. Fostering inclusion is a collective responsibility, and having an actual team to work with is so crucial.”

Meet Jana

Name: Jana Dorsey

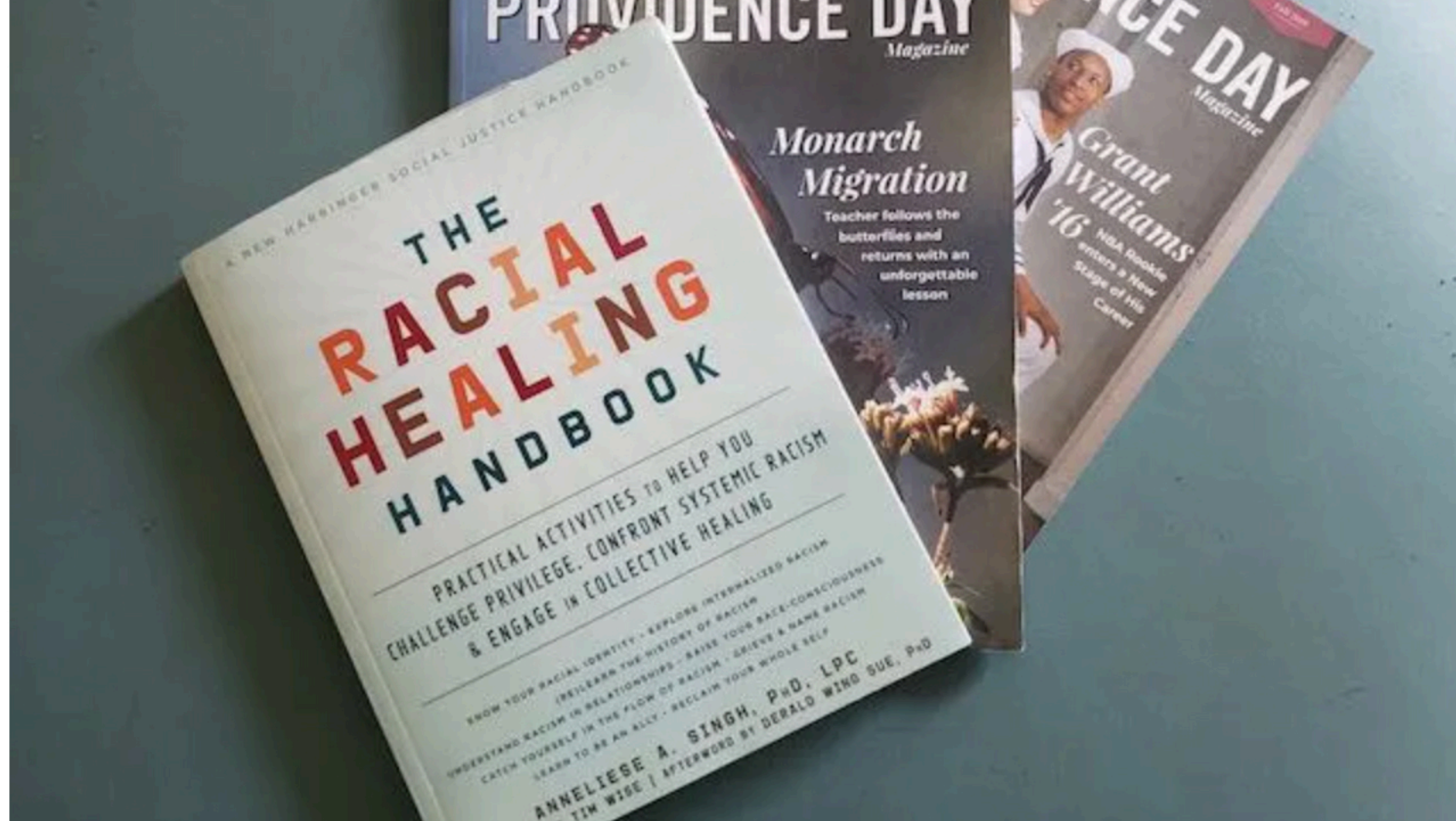
Title: Associate Director of Equity & Inclusion Outreach

Hobbies: Home decor, fashion and styling; travel; caring for houseplants (a new hobby taken on during the pandemic), and cooking, with a specialty of baked macaroni and cheese.

Inspiration: “I am inspired by the people in my village: my parents, my Uncle Paul and my Auntie Sheila (in addition to a host of other family members, friends and mentors.) The values that were instilled in me, coupled with not only my own lived experiences but the experiences of those in my village, keep me grounded. I see these values and experiences as a guide.”

Racial reckoning

Dorsey’s new role takes on urgency given the national dialogue about racial injustice and inequity that was sparked this summer by the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other Black citizens. Suddenly, some independent schools and universities found themselves in a racial reckoning of their own after Black alumni began using social media to share their experiences at majority-white schools and ask those schools to confront past racism. Providence Day School was among them.



As part of the Office of Equity and Inclusion, Dorsey joins a team devoted to supporting and fostering a school community that reflects the nation’s increasing diversity. Her responsibilities include: creating programs to support new families; developing recruitment strategies to attract more diversity to the school, including socio-economic diversity; working with alumni; and providing social media and other communication that shares the school’s progress in equity and inclusion.

“We recognized Jana’s talent and energy, and it was clear by her work on presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg’s campaign that Jana was able to channel her knowledge and passion effectively,” says Nadia Johnson, PDS Director of Equity and Inclusion. “We are excited about the qualities Jana brings to this new role.”

PDS is among a handful of Charlotte-based independent schools that opened in the 1970s, an era of court-ordered busing designed to integrate the nation’s public schools. Those independent schools offered alternatives for parents who may have opposed busing and/or integration.

Dorsey’s job builds on diversity goals included in PDS’ five-year action plan, which outlines the school’s top priorities. A key part of Dorsey’s responsibilities includes working closely with PDS alumni and developing future programming based on what she hears.

“We recognized the need to do a better job sharing the work we are doing in diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as developing our vision for the future. In addition, we want to prioritize the role of alumni, build a support system for new families that come from underrepresented groups, and ensure that we are attracting families that represent the diversity of Charlotte,” Johnson says.

Valuing diversity

A New York native, Dorsey was raised by educators. Her father is an African American studies and Latin American/Caribbean studies professor at Purdue University. Her mother, an immigrant from Nevis, is a community college administrator and consultant. Dorsey is a dual citizen of the United States and St. Kitts and Nevis.

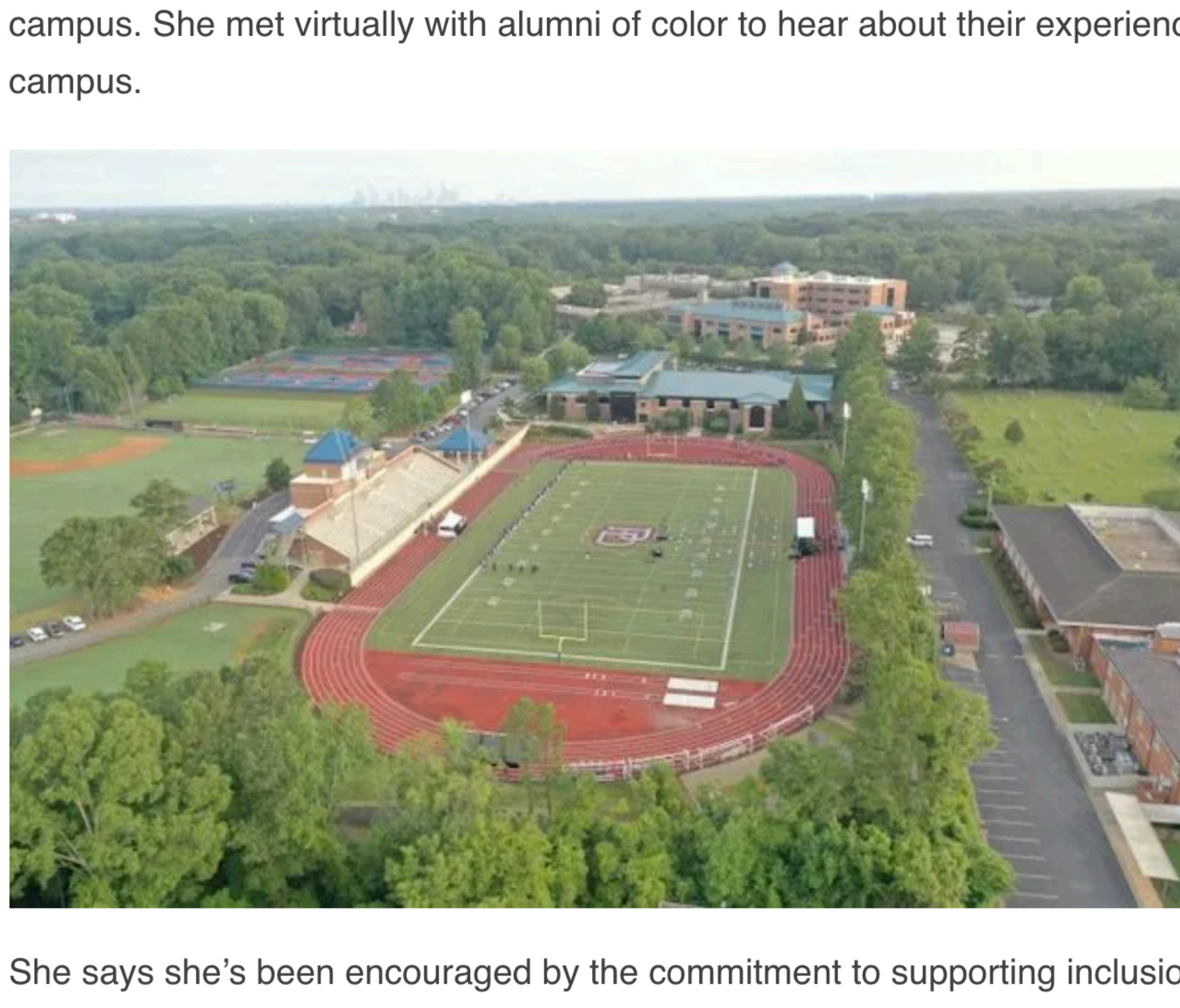
“I come from a melting pot. I understand the importance, the beauty, the value in living, working, breathing and just being around people from every single demographic,” Dorsey says. “It’s something I am passionate about and want to bring that opportunity to others.”

Dorsey attended an independent boarding school, Emma Willard School, in Troy, NY, for her secondary education and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from Purdue University and a Master of Science degree in global studies and international relations from Northeastern University.

This school year, students of color account for 30 percent of the PDS student body, up from nearly 22 percent reported for the 2014-2015 academic year. The current proportion of faculty of color is nearly 25 percent, up from 8 percent in 2008.

Dorsey says hindsight has helped her understand the type of support that she, as a student of color, would have appreciated during her own school years. For example, she recognizes the importance for students of color to see and receive help on campus from faculty and staff who look like them.

During her first few weeks on the job, Dorsey was busy ramping up the department’s social media efforts and promoting Hispanic Heritage Month on campus. She met virtually with alumni of color to hear about their experiences on campus.



She says she’s been encouraged by the commitment to supporting inclusion and increasing relationships with people of color that she sees from division heads and other staff members. Dorsey, along with other PDS staff members and faculty, is also reading *The Racial Healing Handbook: Practical Activities to Help You Challenge Privilege, Confront Systemic Racism, and Engage in Collective Healing* by Anneliese Singh. School employees will meet to discuss their reading.

“It pushes you to reflect, to step outside your own comfort zone,” Dorsey says. “It illustrates a commitment to delving into this work and not just posting on social media; the follow through is what’s important here.”

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For more than 50 years, Providence Day School (PD) has fostered in each student a passion for learning, a strong sense of social responsibility, and a commitment to personal integrity.