

SCHOOL LEADER INSTITUTE: BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY IN DIVISIVE TIMES

Recent events—the 2020 presidential election, movements for justice such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, and the politicization of traditionally nonpolitical issues—have forced school leaders to react hastily, at times haphazardly, to pressing questions raised by students, parents, and faculty. With the election year now behind us, and schools rebuilding their communities and norms, we believe there is an opportunity to create a more thoughtful, values-based approach for navigating divisive political and social issues. Close Up's *School Leader Institute*, created in partnership with Thaden School, is intended to help administrators create a strategic vision and communication plan that supports an inclusive school climate, fosters open and authentic dialogue, and addresses the demands of parents, board members, and other stakeholders.

Over the course of three days, participants will hear from school leaders who have successfully navigated difficult scenarios, deliberate about pressing issues facing independent schools, develop a strategic vision for civil and respectful discourse at school, and develop tools and approaches to implement that vision. Our hope is to provide a space in which leaders can proactively identify their civic education goals so they are prepared to support students, teachers, and parents in these conversations.

The Institute will explore questions such as:

- What kinds of citizens does our democracy need? How can schools help create those citizens?
- How does the current political context impact my school? How can my school respond to it?
- Where are the spaces for civil discourse within my school? How can they be expanded or strengthened?
- Which stakeholders are relevant and worth engaging as the school reestablishes its values, norms, and culture?
- What types of guidance and support do faculty need to engage students with challenging social and political issues?

Institute Overview

Dates: Wednesday, July 28 – Friday, July 30, 2021. All sessions will run from 3pm – 6pm EST (12pm – 3pm PST).

Day 1 – Fostering Civil Discourse: Through a panel discussion with a diverse set of school leaders, participants will consider the contexts in which their schools exist and the challenges and opportunities for respectful civil discourse. Participants will review data gathered by National Association of Independent Schools and Pollyanna in 2020 and share their own goals and hopes for the Institute.

Day 2 – Navigating Challenging Scenarios: Participants will deliberate on a series of case studies drawn from real-world challenges facing peer institutions. Through the deliberation, participants will clarify the goals and values of their schools. Sample scenarios include:

Liberal parents applaud the school for its diversity efforts, but they believe anti-racism training is making students feel ridiculed and belittled for being white. They claim that “racism now goes both ways at our school.”

Parents of conservative students raise concerns that their children are being silenced in political conversations.

Students walk out to protest a lack of diversity in the curriculum and faculty. Some teachers choose to join the walkout. This exacerbates tension among faculty and administrators about the pace and direction of change.

Day 3 – Planning for Change: Participants will work in small cohorts to develop their strategic visions and plans for the upcoming school year. They will consider such questions as:

- Will our school set community-wide norms for political discussion?
- Will our school have expectations and guidelines for faculty and staff regarding how they engage in displays of personal politics with students and families?
- What resources will we provide teachers, students, and families?

Participants will engage in facilitated dialogue about challenges, including communication with parents, faculty, and other stakeholders. Finally, they will share their strategic visions and consider how Institute alumni can continue to support each other during the coming academic year.

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Application Details

Who should attend?

The Institute is designed for administrators, including division heads, heads of schools, academic program coordinators, deans of students, deans of faculty, and other educators who oversee strategic planning and implementation. You must commit to attending all three days of the Institute (July 28, 29, 30).

What is the cost for the Institute?

The fee to attend is \$650 per educator.

What is the application deadline?

Applicants will be accepted on a rolling basis. The final application deadline is May 15. Successful candidates will be notified by June 1, 2021.

How do I apply? Application can be found [here](#).

About Us

Close Up Foundation: Established in 1971, [Close Up](#) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan civic education organization dedicated to helping students develop the knowledge and skills they need to become informed, active, and engaged citizens. Close Up's resources, programs, and professional development offer a balanced and multi-partisan approach to facilitating controversial issue discussions. Each year, Close Up helps thousands of students and teachers across the nation engage in civil discourse and take informed action in their communities.

Thaden School: Founded in 2017 in Bentonville, Arkansas, Thaden School is a co-educational independent day school dedicated to providing a balanced and challenging education that inspires students to lead lives of integrity, purpose, and responsible global citizenship. Central to the school's mission is its commitment to fostering the civil exchange of ideas in the center of the country. By inviting and engaging many perspectives, Thaden enlarges their students' capacity for understanding and prepares them for responsible citizenship and leadership in our pluralistic and multicultural republic. Thaden is committed to actively engaging with the ever-unfinished and essential work of diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism.