

March 17, 2021

Subject: ChLA's Partnership with Archway Consulting Group

Dear ChLA Members,

I am pleased to announce that we have finalized our partnership with **Archway Consulting Group**. This partnership is part of our ongoing efforts to examine and address diversity, equity, inclusion, and access within our organization and provide our members and leaders with the necessary tools to foster a culture of inclusion within our association.

Earlier this month marked the National Education Association's annual Read Across America Day. Since its launch in 1998, the event has been held annually on March 2 to coincide with the birthday of Dr. Seuss. Over the last several years, children's literature scholars and researchers have interrogated the racist content in several books by Dr. Seuss in articles, blogs, and social media. Perhaps the most thorough and prominent analysis can be found in a [2019 article by Katie Ishizuka and Ramón Stephens](#) published in the academic journal, *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*. Grounded in critical literacy and critical race theory, Ishizuka and Stephens not only examine racialized content in fifty children's books by Seuss, they also provide a detailed overview of the popular author's history of publishing racist materials. The well-researched and persuasively argued essay is an essential read for all of us in the field of children's literature.

This year, although not without resistance, we are starting to see evidence of the impact of these crucial efforts. It has not gone unnoticed, for example, that U.S. President Joseph R. Biden [did not mention Seuss](#) in his official [Proclamation on Read Across America Day, 2021](#). A Virginia school district has [made headlines by "no longer emphasizing"](#) Seuss's work during their Read Across America Day events. The National Education Association itself has "pivoted from popular children's author Dr. Seuss to focus on diverse children's books" ([Aspegren, 2021, n.p.](#)). Finally, [Dr. Seuss Enterprises has announced](#) that it will end publication and licensing of 6 Seuss books due to portrayals "that are hurtful and wrong."

While I am personally pleased to see these small but significant shifts in public and professional conversations, it goes without saying that there is so much more work to be done. As I've written in past announcements and a previous President's Message, meaningful change must continue across all levels and in all spaces, including within our association.

Archway Consulting Group is a diversity, equity, and inclusion consulting company located in Tacoma, Washington. Over the next year, they will guide us through a transformational process that will personalize and strategically operationalize diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout our association. Our ability to cultivate our internal capacity and intentionally provide our members with new understanding, tools, and skills is why we have decided to work with them through this partnership. You will hear more details about Archway in official communications coming in the near future. Here, I want to provide you with a brief overview of the first phase of our work.

Before doing so, I want to again thank some of the people who made this initiative possible, including our ad-hoc committee co-chairs Cristina Rhodes and Althea Tait and committee members Karen Chandler, Kristin McIlhagga, Scott

Pollard, and Michelle Pagni Stewart. This committee worked incredibly hard across several months, vetting proposals and meeting with potential consultants before making their final recommendation to the ChLA Board of Directors. I want to thank the Board who unanimously voted in support of this initiative last June, as well as Association Manager Jamie Reed and ChLA Executive Committee members Karen Chandler, Libby Gruner, Maude Hines, and Eric Tribunella for leading us through the final stages of securing this partnership with Archway.

Overview of Phase One: Understanding the Context

Throughout 2021, we will be involved in Phase One of our work, which Archway has titled, “Understanding the Context.” Here is what this work will look like in more detail:

March 2021: Archway will meet with our Steering Committee to initiate the equity visioning and planning process. Archway will share a proposed approach to center and embed equity in ChLA’s Strategic Planning process. Our Steering Committee will share their perspectives on ChLA’s vision for equity and opportunities and issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Association.

Ongoing monthly coordination meetings will occur between Archway and the Steering Committee to promote alignment and integration with the Strategic Planning process and to discuss strategies and frameworks for applying an equity lens to every dimension of our forthcoming Strategic Plan.

April 2021: Background Research and Document Review involving a high-level review of related planning efforts and initiatives, communications efforts via social media, and newsletters focused on equity, diversity, and inclusion at ChLA. This review aims to mine the shared priorities and input collected from current planning processes and initiatives. This synthesis of community data and preferences will inform the Equity Visioning process and the overall Strategic Plan.

July 2021: Informant Interviews will occur, during which Archway will meet with key stakeholders to collect input on the equity-focused issues and opportunities facing our Association. Interviewees will also share critical insights on creating a culture of belonging and improving the Association’s DEI outcomes. The interviews are intended to surface assumptions, hopes, expectations, potential roadblocks, and perceptions of what will be needed to infuse equity throughout the Strategic Plan. Each of these interviews provides an opportunity for key individuals to discuss concerns or priorities in a more intimate environment than that afforded by larger-scale meetings.

September 2021: The Archway team will conduct a focused review of successful practices for advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion. The Archway Team will research and assess promising practices for recruiting and retaining a diverse board and membership, leading to a “Best and Promising Practices Memorandum” that will share key results and findings.

October 2021: A Community Survey developed by Archway to collect input on issues and priorities to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion at ChLA will be distributed and promoted by ChLA to a broad range of association-wide stakeholders, membership, Board members, administrative staff, and any external Association partners.

December 2021: Phase One Wrap-Up will involve a teleconference with the ChLA board to present the project outcomes and summary documents to close out this initial phase of our work.



In closing, this is an essential aspect of our continued efforts to strengthen ChLA and make it a safer and more inclusive organization for all our members. You can learn more about many of these initiatives via the [ChLA website](#).

Thank you, as always, for reading. I welcome your feedback, input, and suggestions.

With gratitude and in solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Thomas Crisp', is written in a cursive style.

Thomas Crisp
President of the Children's Literature Association