



June 18, 2020

To the PDS Community,

Over the course of four evenings during the last week, I have done something I have not done in months: turn off my microphone and listen. Rather than guide or direct, I have been both student of and witness to the stories of Black students and parents, as they have unfolded for me and my Board and Leadership Team colleagues the hope and hopelessness they have encountered and endured within our school community. Four nights of town halls. Four nights of parents' aspirations for their children. Four nights of students' tales of wishing to be seen and wanting to be heard. Difficult as each was to hear, I cannot imagine how difficult each was to bear or to tell. With the close of each town hall, I have grown angry at having allowed this weary routine of exclusion to take place during my time as head of school. I have grown sad at having made vulnerable those many students who expected me to keep them safe. While reciting our School's grand narrative, I have failed to speak for us all.

There are many more stories to be told and to be heard; we will find ways to hear them all. Next Monday, we will hear from our Black alumni at the fifth town hall. Eager to share theirs, our students and alumni have taken to social media, as their stories populate the Instagram account @blackatpds. If you wonder what life is like for our Black students, read the accounts there. Think of the ways in which our community's failure to give voice to these students has compelled them to give voice to their own stories. There are powerful lessons here, all of which we must heed and each of which we ignore at our own peril.

My self-assessment is well underway, as is that of our School's leadership. It will continue for years to come. We cannot undo what has been told to us by parents of young children and of young men and women whom we invited into our hallways and classrooms. We can acknowledge that great paradox: having invited these families into our school community, we have kept them from partaking fully of its experience.

We all have a role now. Here is the moment for each of us to look within, to find those recesses in our hearts where prejudice and intolerance may linger. Now is the moment to root them out and swear that they will never return. We will never find a better time. I pledge to use my office and the resources of our School to bring about change. Each of us can use whatever tools and gifts we possess to help redeem our community. The time for silence in our School is over. The time to face our School's blindness is upon us. The time for all good people in our School to rise up in support of our Black families—and of all families who feel the sting of disrespect—is before us. Or, as the parent of a lower schooler urged me on Monday night, the time for us to create a new vision of Princeton Day School is at hand.

At the close of story after story, the teller would add a version of this phrase: "I am a Panther, and I will be one for life." The love of these families for our School has not waned. At this moment, our School faces forward, acknowledges its faults, and embraces its responsibility to all of its families. There is so much more for us to do to become the school we want to be, to become the school we believe we are. As is so often the case, our children will lead us. Even now, they show us the way. Follow them. Follow me. We cannot fail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "PJS" with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Paul J. Stellato
Head of School