

GARRISON FOREST SCHOOL

300 GARRISON FOREST ROAD • OWINGS MILLS, MARYLAND 21117

CHRIS HUGHES, HEAD OF SCHOOL

Dear GFS families and alumnae,

In conversations over the past few days with members of our community, including alumnae who have reached out, current parents and students, and colleagues in our staff and faculty, I have grappled with how to encapsulate the many emotions, fears and uncertainty that so many of us are feeling. I want to take this opportunity to name with clarity some of the things we are thinking about and working through here at Garrison Forest School. I am thinking especially about how we are supporting our students, specifically our black students, and how we will move forward together.

First and foremost, directly and unequivocally, Black Lives Matter, and the voices of black students matter on our campus and in our community. While this is a direct statement, it's not a simple one; the murder of black men and women and systemic failures that have led to where we are now as a country tells us this. The current nationwide and international outpouring of grief, protest and demands for change tells us this. Our own history as a city and a school tells us this.

So where do we begin? How do we make sense of the pain, the outrage, the sense of hopelessness? How do we uplift and support the members of our community who are feeling this so deeply, and ensure that this is a place where they feel safe, loved and heard?

We can start by acknowledging that we, as a community, have important work to do. When I was hired—even before my first day in the summer of 2018, I was given one overarching mission, on top of the work of running a school: it was to bring a community back together that had been fractured and shaken in the preceding several years. I see evidence of this still today in some of the thoughtful and pained responses and calls to action we've received. While I think we have made good and important progress in building an inclusive and respectful community, there is always more to be done.

Right now, as the nation and our community stand at a pivotal moment, we are seeking to bridge this wide gap in meaningful ways. We do this by publicly standing behind and supporting our black students, family and alumnae; by providing resources to our faculty, staff, parents and students as we all process our pain, grief, confusion and desire to be a part of the solution; by learning more about what it means to be a helpful ally in this fight; by hearing our alumnae and current students and families when they reach out—by listening and being thoughtful as an administrative team about concerns that are brought to us; by pledging to make sure we continue making progress in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, social action and community education around issues that matter.

Our motto, *Esse Quam Videri*, To Be Rather Than To Seem, is at the heart of everything we do, and our aim is always to be authentic in where we are and where we need to be. Garrison Forest School is a place that helps girls and young women find their voices; never is this pursuit more important than today. The world needs confident, creative, compassionate solutions to complex issues. One of the calls that resonated so powerfully with me in outreach from our alumnae was to make Garrison Forest a space where students, particularly students of color, feel not only safe, but empowered to use their voices and speak their truths. We aim to create a loving and supportive space where

students are engaged in meaningful work, and where we lift up voices that need to be heard.

As we prepare to celebrate the Class of 2020 and welcome them into our family of alumnae, we are so thankful for the community that is all around us—aware, engaged and focused on creating positive change in the world. We will continue striving to do our very best and being a part of that change.

All my best,



Chris Hughes
Head of School



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