

July 2020

Dear AAA Families:

First, let me say “thank you” for taking the time to read these letters and learn more about Compass and about each of our family’s journey to Ancillae. I hope you find our perspectives informative and transparent.

Early in 2013, my husband and I began looking for schools for our 3 year old daughter who had just “graduated” from pre-school. Since we had about a year before she would start kindergarten, we both wanted to find a school that would educate and nurture her through that last stage of nursery and on to a formal learning environment. And to be honest, because I was working @60 hours weekly while commuting daily to NYC, I didn’t want to keep switching schools so I advocated for a permanent school home, covering K-8 or K-12.

Public school was always an option, but childcare was less dependable given both of our busy schedules and my husband’s recent critical health diagnosis. I wanted a one stop shop including school and extended day. Plus I felt that a smaller, more personalized learning environment would encourage confidence, independence and character development. And so the search was on. We (well I) looked at more than a dozen schools in the area, public, private, Friends society, parochial and Jewish. It was not until we met with Ancillae that we felt that we were home. The staff and administration were warm, caring and knowledgeable. Gabrielle loved it immediately. Although we were very concerned about the lack of diversity among students and teachers we felt confident that our daughter would be well served at Ancillae and that, like me, she would remain connected to her African American roots via intentional experiences and instruction at home and via extra- curricular activities. So we enrolled her in AAA’s Montessori pre-school. She will enter 5<sup>th</sup> grade here at AAA this fall.

I joined Compass during its inception in 2016 as part of the Education subcommittee. Then, Compass was the latest incarnation of previous parent led DEI efforts that had for various reasons never gained much traction or a foothold in the AAA community. The founding leadership had adopted an Asian child and wanted to address the lack of diversity and inclusion their young daughter was experiencing at the school. Plans were made, meetings held but progress that that year was limited. And the following year that family left the school and Compass’ future seemed doubtful.

But I, Crystal and many, many others still believed in the concept of Compass and its potential. And while the school administration could be described as, not exactly enthusiastic (jaded perhaps?) – they were patiently indulgent and supportive of our fledgling efforts. And that polite acceptance would have to be enough to keep this group going. For, it only takes a mustard seeds worth of faith to move forward, right? So we re-configured Compass’ operating model and with the help of AAA administration, returning parents and some new families, we stumbled and fumbled our way through to standing up a more permanent and impactful organization. We were initially focused on book lists, focus months highlighting different cultural contributions with famous person and fact lists and promoting community via social gatherings. And while those activities remain relevant, Compass’ actions are now more strategic. We do it for our children, for ALL of our children, our families and our community.

And here we are, almost 4 years later – Compass still standing because of the support of our AAA families and with the unfailing commitment from AAA’s faculty and administration. Since then I’ve changed jobs twice, buried Gabby’s father and like many of our AAA families and staff – experienced all the joys and sorrows of life. Ancillae has been there for our family through it all. The school isn’t perfect. But the administration attends every meeting and when asked, provides supporting resources. There is bias, micro-aggressive behaviors, outright racism, indifference and sometimes willful ignorance in the classrooms, athletic fields, cafeteria, library and hallways. But this spring AAA stood up and unequivocally publically denounced the murders of Brionna Taylor, George Floyd and others. The world can be a tough place. Many people of African descent, Hispanic descent, Native American cultures, Asian and Pacific Islanders, other peoples of color, Muslim, Christian, Jewish and other faiths, gender and sexual orientation and identities know this all too well. But that’s what we, with Compass and the rest of our AAA community are working to influence, develop and change. Join us on the journey to a better AAA, a stronger community, and to a better world. Thank you.

With best regards,

*Alyson Beasley Bradley*