

GARRISON FOREST SCHOOL

300 GARRISON FOREST ROAD • OWINGS MILLS, MARYLAND 21117

Dear GFS community,

We are writing today with an update on the work of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Board. Since forming last month, the team has been meeting twice weekly to set priorities and then begin actively working on plans for the coming year. As a first order of business, we determined that listening sessions for all of our constituents would be imperative to truly understand the scope of the challenges we face as a school in moving toward being an anti-racist, inclusive community. Those sessions were or are being held for faculty and staff, Middle and Upper School students, all current GFS parents and alumnae.

We would like to directly address some of the concerns and feedback we've had around the listening sessions:

- In offering listening sessions, our intention is not to put the burden of doing this work on those who have experienced trauma; rather, an opportunity to share and be heard is something that has been requested by alumnae, students and parents in the past and was reiterated in June as we embarked on this work. Anyone who is not comfortable sharing in this format should not feel pressured to attend. In addition, to ensure that anyone--students, faculty and staff, parents or alumnae--who did not feel safe sharing their experiences in an open forum still has an opportunity to be heard, we have created an [anonymous feedback form](#) so that we could capture their input. Our goal here is simply to hear and learn as much as we can and to have all of our community members find a platform that feels comfortable to them if they have experiences they would like to share.
- For student sessions, invitations were sent to all 2019-2020 Middle and Upper School students using their GFS emails, with the exception of the Class of 2020, who should have received invitations via their personal email. If you or your student did not receive this invitation, please let us know. Newly enrolled students and families who will be joining GFS for the 2020-21 school year did not receive information about these listening sessions since the goal was to capture experiences that have already happened at GFS; however, we look forward to including you in future sessions and updates from this group as you join our community.
- All experiences shared within these listening sessions and via the feedback form will be collated, without names attached, and provided to the entire DEI Advisory Board to inform next steps.
- In planning these sessions, our initial thoughts were that students would be more comfortable sharing with members of the GFS community, which is why the student sessions were led by members of the DEI Board. For the parent and alumnae listening sessions, we will be using professional, experienced facilitators. The facilitators who will be moderating these listening sessions are licensed, practicing psychotherapists who have experience working with young women and teens and a focus on racial justice and equality. There will be a member of the DEI Advisory Board present to observe for the duration of the call; in addition, the sessions will be recorded solely for sharing with the DEI Advisory Board afterward. This format is intended to provide a safe space for all those present to share.
- Later this summer, we will offer additional listening sessions for students, run by third-party facilitators, for those who wanted to

participate but were not comfortable sharing with members of this Board.

- The initial focus of our work is around Black students and students of color; however, the DEI Advisory Board is intended as a permanent working group at GFS and we will be looking at the experiences of all underrepresented students on our campus, including international students and students who identify as LGBTQ+. The long-term work of the group is meant to be inclusive and all-encompassing, not exclusive or narrowly focused.

In addition to holding listening sessions, the Advisory Board is working in smaller groups to develop initiatives in such areas as hiring practices, crafting a broader vision statement around DEI work campus-wide, curriculum review and community engagement. Examples of the kinds of action steps and ideas we are currently working through include:

- Reserve time for our department heads and academic leaders to begin delving into this work before school starts and to develop measurable, actionable steps (to potentially include curriculum review or modifications) that can take place in each academic department in each division
- Develop faculty and staff training, to be started prior to the opening of school
- Launch a review of our student and faculty handbooks, with the goal of identifying areas of improvement or clarification around antiracist behavior and actions
- Reviewing hiring practices
- Developing clear policies toward appropriate use of language in the classroom and identifying specific and consistent consequences around racist or demeaning remarks

We will use what is learned through the listening sessions to confirm that these are the appropriate and needed areas of focus, and will use our time in the coming weeks to build out these and other initiatives into more comprehensive plans. We will be releasing more information about the work being done in these subcommittees in a few weeks, including specific plans and action steps, and have created this page to provide the most up-to-date information about the board's work: [gfs.org/DEIAdvisoryBoard](https://www.gfs.org/DEIAdvisoryBoard).

We want to confirm, as a group, our dedication to creating change and progress and thank you for your patience as we continue to delve deeper into this work which is so vital to our school and community. This is just the start of an ongoing process to lead our community to a better place. One thing we have so appreciated over the past few weeks as this work got underway is the true desire to make Garrison Forest a better place for all students, families and faculty and staff. Even in sharing painful experiences, so many of those we have heard from are invested in this community and care deeply about seeing change. We will not let you down.

Thank you to everyone who has already shared or will share in the future, and we look forward to providing continued updates on this work as we move forward.

Best wishes,
The GFS DEI Advisory Board

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