



September 29, 2020

To the SPA community,

I wrote to you in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd to share the difficult but necessary conversations that were taking place within our larger school community. This work is not new to SPA, although the events of late May have given our ongoing diversity efforts a fresh and deserving sense of urgency.

Over the last fifteen years we have worked assiduously to create and nurture a more pluralistic version of ourselves. Karen Dye, who spearheaded our diversity efforts for more than ten years as Director of Intercultural Life, established the foundations of our program. Under her leadership, SPA launched a series of successful initiatives: affinity groups for students of color, a long-standing and successful partnership with Saint Paul's Penumbra Theater on a K-12 diversity curriculum, and the introduction of Courageous Conversations, a program for students, faculty, and staff focused on creating authentic conversations on race, cultural conflicts, and identity. Dr. Naomi Taylor, Karen's successor, was instrumental in leading this summer's discussion groups for faculty, staff, parents, and students on race, racism, and diversity at SPA. SPA recently hosted Julie Lythcott-Haims, formerly a Dean at Stanford University, for a series of conversations with students, faculty, and parents on the experiences of students of color at predominantly white institutions. Dr. Taylor served as moderator for these presentations and will coordinate future conversations and book groups focused on Ms. Lythcott-Haims' work.

Despite progress and success, work remains to be done. To that end, we are formally launching a new initiative entitled ***Defining Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at SPA***. A consideration of the impact and influence of race at SPA will be a top priority for the Steering Committee that will lead the initiative. We will also consider how gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status influence our quest to create an inclusive school culture. This exciting project will invite our community to examine the intersection between our ideals as we strive to create a vibrant and equitable pluralism and life at school as a lived experience. There are many ways to approach this topic. Two elegant and deceptively simple questions provide a valuable starting point: Does every student at SPA have an equal chance to thrive? Are there habits and practices that inhibit our quest to create an inclusive community? Providing a full and honest answer to these questions will enable us to understand where we are succeeding and, most importantly, where and how we as a community need to improve.

A Steering Committee chaired by Naomi Taylor, Director of Intercultural Life, will lead this work; Jill Romans, Assistant Head of School for Student Development and Community Engagement, and I will serve as co-chairs. The Steering Committee, which will include representatives from different school constituencies, from the Board of Trustees to students, will assist in the preparation of surveys and the collection and analysis of data which will inform the development of a three-to-five year strategic plan for our diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work. A list of the members of the Steering Committee is at the end of this letter. We have selected a service specializing in school surveys and a consultant to assist us in the preparation and analysis of our surveys and the interpretation of the data.

SPA's mission is to shape the minds and the hearts of the people who will change the world. Our students will not be able to fulfill our mission unless they understand and respect the needs, hopes, and aspirations of everyone in their community. ***Defining Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at SPA*** is an ambitious project that will help bring our mission fully to life. I look forward to keeping our entire community apprised of our progress over the next several months. As always, many thanks for the role you play in this extraordinary community.

Best,

Bryn S. Roberts  
Head of School