

MARET

NOSCERE VIVERE EST  TO LEARN IS TO LIVE

March 3, 2021

Dear Maret Community,

When @blackatmaret emerged on the social media platform Instagram on June 23, 2020, as school leaders, we were dismayed, disheartened, angry, and sad at the pain expressed in the posts, pain that had occurred decades ago, pain that occurred just weeks before. The experiences of racial harm described by students, faculty, families, and alumni revealed our failure to dismantle institutional and systemic racism at Maret.

While many members of our community have been committed to equity and inclusion over decades and have taken courageous steps forward, the posts revealed that we had not made the kind of progress that was embedding itself into the fabric of our community and protecting our Black community members. The posts ultimately demonstrated a need for all of us to work continuously on our own personal racial identity development, a process that is without end and involves continuous and earnest self-reflection and self-inquiry.

THE ANTI-RACISM TASK FORCE

In her June 30 letter to the community, Head of School Marjo Talbott announced the creation of the Anti-Racism Task Force (ARTF) and clarified that its purpose would be to “unearth our own systemic and institutional racism and to develop meaningful changes which will help us live up to our Mission and Core Values.” This sense of responsibility to all who had been harmed weighed heavily on us as we worked on the Anti-Racism Task Force. We were committed to directly address the racism front and center. The Task Force began its work in late July of 2020 as the body of people who would work with objective, outside consultants to examine critical areas of our school through an equity audit. The Task Force was a combination of trustees, faculty, and parents in leadership positions with various tenure in the Maret community, each with different perspectives.

We met weekly for six months, tackling issues that we knew were part of the School’s racist patterns, as well as various aspects of the audit. In all honesty, we could not have predicted the breadth of the deep dive of our school’s

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Ian Cameron | *Chair of the Board of Trustees, Maret parent*

Courtney Cothran-Fenner | *Director of Equity & Inclusion*

Nina Candia | *Assistant Director of Upper School*

Susan Epps | *Assistant Head of School*

David Hall | *Trustee, Chair of the Board Education & Equity Committee, Maret parent*

Allie Levey | *Director of College Counseling*

Krystle Merchant | *Director of Community Engagement*

Clif Morgan | *MPA Equity & Inclusion Liaison, Maret parent*

Lex Sant | *Trustee, Maret parent*

Marjo Talbott | *Head of School, parent of Maret alumni*

Sylvia Davis White | *Trustee, Maret parent*

systems and cultures we were about to take. Part of our process was not only to examine the pieces of data collected in the audit but also to constantly check ourselves as we proceeded forward: Were we having equitable conversations? What were our own patterns of participation in discussion? How were we talking about and engaging around inequity? How did our own racial biases and lenses impact the way we were interpreting information? This constant reflection helped us to do our best work.

OUR CONSULTING PARTNERSHIP

We knew that we needed external support in this endeavor in order to reflect on our current reality and create a plan to help Maret move closer to being the anti-racist culture we desire and envision. Our equity consulting group was the San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools (SF-CESS), led by Greg Peters and Camilla Greene, who bring a collective 75 years of experience as K–12 educators and as anti-racist scholars and facilitators. Maret has a storied history with SF-CESS; they introduced us (with the leadership of former faculty Holly Hinderlie and Eliza Alexander) to the foundational principles to form our in-house professional development seminar, Deepening the Discussion About Race. They know the arc of Maret’s equity story, as well as our weaknesses as an institution. Moreover, a relational trust had been formed through a decade of collaborative work. We thought this would help us to have honest conversations around what Maret needed to do to repair harm and to shape preventive measures going forward.

PROCESS

The Anti-Racism Task Force committed to involving the community in the work through a deep equity audit that included listening groups and surveys, overseen by SF-CESS. There were three ways SF-CESS gathered information. The Task Force was given summaries each step of the way.

We are providing you links below for you to access various aspects of the equity audit at a more granular level. We want to reiterate that the chapters you read are the work of SF-CESS.

As you approach the findings and recommendations for future actions, we ask you to resist the urge to parse every inch of the audit process, not to dissect every word but to look at the collective narrative and ask yourself: Where do I see myself in this story? Wherever I find myself, what are the steps I must take to do better?

- ▶ [Read more: SF-CESS Background/Overview](#)
- ▶ [Glossary of Terms](#)

EQUITY AUDIT

1. Listening Sessions.

SF-CESS conducted 12 Race-Alike Listening Sessions with 128 participants and received 53 written responses submitted from families, faculty, students, and alumni. At the end of October, they compiled and shared a comprehensive summary to listening session participants and to the Task

Force. The summary spelled out numerous recommendations from participants in the listening sessions that were integrated into their final report, including:

- White dominant culture power structures need to be identified and addressed.
- Structures and timetables for cross-race dialogue and anti-racist training with the entire Maret community (students, families, faculty, and leadership) need to be created, implemented, and embedded in school life and in the curriculum. The community needs to go through this growth together in order for an anti-racist Maret identity to be enacted, embraced, and woven into the fabric of the school.
- The words accountability and transparency showed up in every listening group. Maret needs to actively build trust through accountability structures, ongoing engagement, and open, consistent communication. Maret needs to enact explicit and public accountability structures, create new forums for community engagement and decision-making, and consistently report out and get feedback on what the school is doing and what changes are being experienced as a result.

[▶ Read more: SF-CESS Listening Group](#)

2. Cultural Proficiency Survey

SF-CESS conducted a Cultural Proficiency Survey—all current Upper School students, the entire faculty, and many families participated in order to determine where Maret is on the continuum of cultural awareness. Below are a few of the major findings from the survey, which are outlined in depth in the final report:

- Regarding racial equity and inclusion, there is a definite split between intent and impact; our intention as a school is earnest, but the impact is not substantial.
- Students across racial difference are having radically different experiences at Maret.
- Racial identity development work among students and faculty is uneven, as much of it is optional and not required.

[▶ Read more: SF-CESS Cultural Proficiency Survey](#)

3. Institutional Audit

With the assistance of our consultants, the Task Force conducted an Institutional Audit—a self-assessment to identify, interrupt, and transform inequities that exist in key areas of the School's operations. The Task Force worked in four sub-groups to take deep dives and research four areas:

- Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction
- Personalization and Belonging
- Leadership and Engagement
- Core Systems

[▶ Read more: SF-CESS Institutional Audit](#)

SYSTEM FOR HEALING

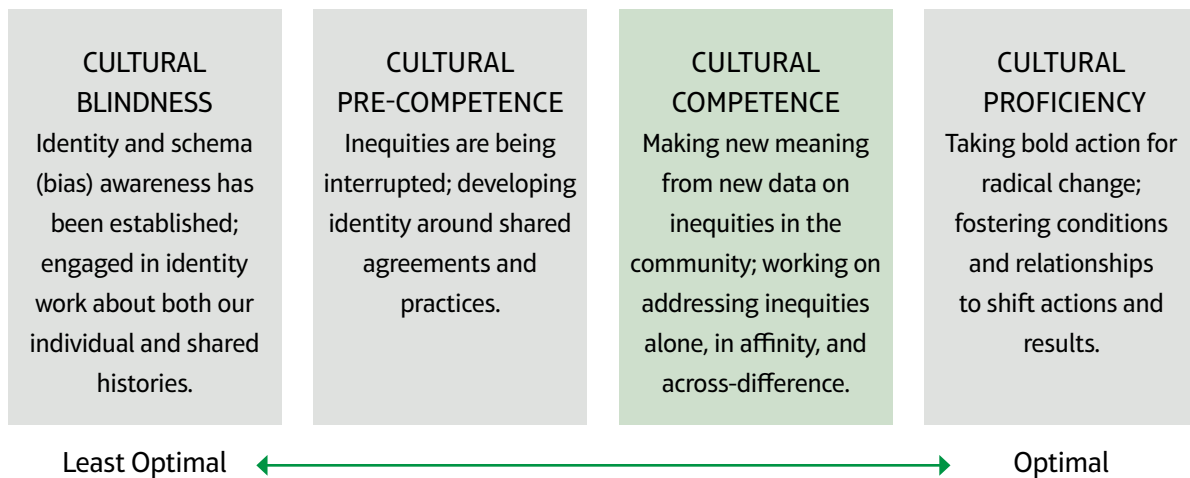
Finally, based on all the data collected, our consultants recommended a System for Healing when racial harm has occurred. The strategies will be used throughout our community for students, faculty, and families:

1. to work proactively to prevent racial harm by shoring up the community's anti-racism skills,
2. to take a regular pulse of racialized interactions within the school community, and
3. to respond to incidents of racial harm.

► [Read more: SF-CESS System of Healing](#)

FINDINGS

The Stages of Transformation, in regard to creating radical change for equity and justice in schools, is the scale used by SF-CESS to evaluate where Maret is in terms of its cultural proficiency, anti-racism, and impactful equity. The four stages are:



Inclusive of all data—listening groups, the Cultural Proficiency Survey, audit of foundational areas of the school—SF-CESS found us to be in the Cultural Competence stage of transformation (highlighted in green above). It is critical to keep in mind that this work is continuous, requiring constant reflection on our processes. The stages are also sliding and dynamic—they are not fixed. Today we are at Cultural Competence but could begin to, for example, enact inequitable policies, shifting us to Cultural Pre-Competence or even to Cultural Blindness. We could also develop and implement more equitable and anti-racist policies that could shift us toward Cultural Proficiency. Lastly, the Cultural Competence stage is an overall assessment, meaning there are some areas where we are competent and proficient at the same time that there are also areas in which we demonstrate pre-competence and/or blindness. This particular evaluation should make us neither proud nor complacent but should help us as we design the blueprint for re-structuring our anti-racist practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Through our listening groups, survey, and @blackatmaret, we heard the call for immediate and real action; in conjunction with SF-CESS, we have identified the areas where work needs to take place. Many of the plans we have going forward will take time to allow for proper training and protocols to ensure we do this work right and in a manner that is lasting. Actions on other recommendations will begin in the next few weeks while some changes are underway already. Making these plans optimal and bias-free will be an ongoing and continuous process, as we are constantly fighting the biases we all bring to the common space of Maret.

Even though we had originally hoped to bring these recommendations to our full community by early February, we also wanted to ensure time for the Anti-Racism Task Force and SF-CESS to complete its breadth of work as thoroughly as possible. We presented the findings and recommendations to the full faculty on February 17, 2021, and to the full Board of Trustees on February 18, 2021. We now bring these recommendations to our larger community (students, families, alumni, and parents of alumni).

Here is a brief summary of the recommendations that we are already working to structure and implement.

Student Voice	Overwhelmingly, student voice needs to be incorporated throughout a number of our systems and especially in the spaces that are measuring and evaluating equity at Maret. This will include representation on the Anti-Racism Advisory Council, meetings with the Committee on Equity & Inclusion, and a regular feedback cycle between the student body (beyond Student Council) and the school administration.
Committee on Equity & Inclusion	This leadership team (known as CEI) has actually been in place at Maret for several years. However, with the recommendations from the equity audit, this team of leaders will expand in size, increase its meeting frequency in order to keep urgent issues even more at the forefront, and review recommendations from the Anti-Racism Advisory Council in order to shape school policy on racial equity.
Anti-Racism Advisory Council	This is a body of individuals in our community (students, faculty, families, and alumni) who will work to proactively prevent incidents of racial harm from happening through shared observations about racial equity in the community.
System for Reporting Racial Harm	This is how people in our community can report an instance of racial harm. This would lead to a restorative practice protocol.

Restorative Practices This system (a series of small meeting protocols led by faculty facilitators trained in Restorative Practices) will be our way of doing deeper reparative emotional work with students and faculty who are involved in an incident of racial harm. Part of this work involves self-reflection, as well as “making it right.” This does not replace consequences but works in conjunction with consequences.

Systems Needing Anti-Racism Structures This is a re-examination of our processes in order to make them racially equitable; these systems include the make-up of our leadership, our hiring practices, our evaluation of students, and our relationship-building between faculty and students. This also includes embedding even deeper anti-racist work into our Wellness curriculum, where our identity and equity education currently lives.

Ongoing Professional Development for Faculty Faculty and, in particular, school leadership should deepen their anti-racist work. School leadership should also make their own work a transparent model for the rest of the faculty. We will regularly update our wider community about the anti-racist steps we are taking in terms of our professional development.

A Racial Reckoning This would be a large-scale project to codify Maret’s racial narrative and to make it known. This project would: (1) encompass the history of the land upon which Maret sits; (2) acknowledge the Indigenous people and all those who have lived on the land, as well as the seminal leaders of Woodley home and the School; (3) research the legacy of their identities and the narratives over time from across the breadth of our community; (4) identify changes in school demographics, achievements, and evolution of policies; and (5) publicly acknowledge and take responsibility for racial harm. We have begun working with faculty and students of the Woodley Historical Society to begin to process how we would complete this.

As the School builds upon these actions that are in progress, the Task Force further recommends Maret take the following steps which have yet to be structured:

Anti-Racist Expectations for Faculty We must create a set of baseline expectations for faculty as anti-racist representatives of Maret. This would include such elements as hiring, advising, teaching, collaboration, and evaluation. This would be part of a comprehensive program to prevent racial harm.

Anti-Racist Curriculum for Families The school should develop a framework for teaching anti-racist practices to the parent, guardian, and caregiver community so that they will be aligned. This would be another component of the program to prevent racial harm.

Across-Difference Affinity

In conjunction with individual racial identity work and racial identity work within affinity groups, there should be increased opportunities for across-difference work between affinity groups. This would also be a component of the program to prevent racial harm.

Black Student Leadership

A direct quotation from the consulting firm is that “Maret should disproportionately elevate Black student voices and leadership in areas that matter most, as this equity audit is in response to the reality of @blackatmaret.” This would be a part of our ongoing anti-racist leadership development, which includes student leadership.

The Task Force recommends that the School report to the community on a regular basis the progress made in implementing these recommendations. Maret must hold itself accountable for making meaningful and sustained change, and always with a sense of urgency.

A critical point to keep in mind as we endeavor in this work comes directly from the text of the SF-CESS report: “Issues of inequities plague our students and communities across race, class, gender, sexuality, language, ability, etc. and our commitment to heal harm should cross these demographics as well. Lifting and highlighting the anti-Black sentiment and harm within a community does not minimize this—in fact it serves the greater goals of equity. Explicitly naming and interrupting anti-Blackness as a priority does not mean we cannot and should not address other forms of inequity. Rather, focusing on understanding and interrupting anti-Blackness and its place in the architecture of our society and therefore schools is key to serving all students better.”

Our consultants at SF-CESS reminded the Task Force that this critical work must be approached with humility. We undoubtedly will make mistakes, acknowledge them, and then make it right. Moreover, the SF-CESS report, their recommendations, and the action the School takes going forward are part of a journey that began more than a decade ago when Maret implemented our Deepening the Discussion About Race initiative. Every faculty member has attended this intensive training program. We are grateful to our community for embracing this work to oppose systemic racism. Still, we have fallen short. We trust our community together will carry this work forward.

WE ARE SORRY

More than anything in our research this fall, there was an emergent and a desperate need for the school to be more authentic, to be more transparent, and to be more vulnerable. The Task Force would like to offer this apology in that spirit of authenticity, transparency, and vulnerability. We know an apology does not at all repair or reverse the tremendous hurt that has happened; however, it is the very least we owe our community, especially our Black community:

We are sorry for the many years of hurt that we have caused.

We are sorry for cultivating, intentional or not, a community of mistrust, of inaction, of prioritization of certain voices over others.

We are sorry for not listening to people when they told us truths that were hard to hear.

We are sorry for being blind to the white dominant culture that is embedded in us.

We are sorry for not leaning into our own equity education when making decisions.

We are sorry for defaulting to norms that center identities of power instead of centering the most powerless first.

We are sorry for not seeing the people who needed most to be seen.

We are sorry for failing you and for failing to live up to our mission.

We commit, with full throats and saying it with our chests, to the process of eradicating racism at Maret.

We welcome your thoughts and feedback; collective dialogue will be essential as we work together to build an anti-racist culture at Maret. We believe that, together, we can do this. We have to.

Sincerely,

Courtney Cothran-Fenner
Anti-Racism Task Force Co-Chair

Ian Cameron
Anti-Racism Task Force Co-Chair