

Advancing Social Justice

This letter from Head of School Tim Seeley went out to the GSA community on June 17, 2020.

Perhaps, like me, you too have been struck by the number of institutions, businesses, and organizations across the country moved to speak out against the abhorrent killing of George Floyd and so many other Black Americans. What about GSA? How should GSA, a school, respond to the horror of George Floyd's death, to the protests it has sparked, and to the larger issues of systemic racism raised by Black Lives Matter?

We respond in the first place by cleaving to our mission as a school: to equip students with knowledge and skills, in this case, to understand the roots of racism in our culture, and to learn about and become sensitive to the structures that are still in place today that support racism and oppression, whether intentional or not. Our goal as a school must be, as always, not to tell students *what to think*, but to teach them *how to think well*; to give them the information they need to make responsible choices; to nurture in them the motivation to make the world a better place, and the confidence and courage to do so.

And at this time we need to do even more. We must modify teaching and learning in light of these profoundly concerning issues. When GSA opens in the fall—whether remotely or in person— every department and program will be incorporating into its curriculum materials and lesson plans that raise matters of racism, gender bias, and other issues of social justice. While these issues need not become, in every case, the main focus of a course, they must be unmistakably present: in some of the books students read, historical events and figures they will discuss, problems they will work to solve, topics they will write about. Every corner of our program needs to find ways to grapple with thorny issues of social justice. GSA courses will bring to the fore an issue of social justice about which we may have been silent in the past, using it as the ground upon which we teach the knowledge, skills, history, and attitudes of all the disciplines our curriculum comprises.

In moving beyond mere statements of support for greater justice in our country, we can as a school do something that helps bring about greater justice. Otherwise, all we are teaching our students is that there is nothing we can do.