Student Demands from May 15, 2019 - Follow-up

In the Spring of 2019, students in the Grace Church School high school division submitted a letter outlining demands that would help our school come closer to our goal of being an anti-racist community. Through several meetings in the spring of 2019, and work carried out during the fall and winter of the 2019-2020 school year, we have made progress in responding to their requests. While we did not communicate with the student signatories effectively during this school year, we are committed to doing so going forward, as collaboration is essential to transforming our school into a more inclusive and welcoming place.

Some of these goals have been met or will be immediately, while others will be longer term, and even more will be constantly evolving and changing in response to the needs of our students and our community. We hope to both maintain solid quarterly follow-up about our progress, while innovating and responding appropriately as we grow into the community we hope to be. The inter-school organization, Black Students Demanding Change, has offered additional demands to the wider NYC school communities and we hope to work with our Grace representatives to explore those this summer.

The following represents an update from our original demand response issued on June 16, 2019.

Diversify the admissions team:
In ongoing efforts to diversify our team, we made some strides in 2019-2020. In our High School division, two of the three people in the admissions office are people of color, one of whom is dedicated to admissions work on a full time basis, and one of whom splits her time with the college counseling staff. We are working to apply the same efforts to our Early Childhood/Lower/Middle School admissions teams. We will continue to examine how our admissions department can help further our anti-racism goals.

Statistics on applicants:
By the end of September 2020, we will assemble and share data from the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 admissions cycles in a follow up report. In the coming year, the newly formed Institutional Culture Committee of the Board of Trustees will be tasked with developing metrics and reporting timelines that ensure our diversity and anti-racism commitments are upheld.

Hiring and Representation:
According to metrics collected for the Board of Trustees, 10 out of 20 new hires for the 2019-20 school year self-identified as people of color, 5 of which were faculty members. For this coming school year, 9 out of 19 new employees are people of color, with 6 being on the faculty. These new employees include two senior administrators of color in the roles of Chief Financial Officer and Director of Advancement. The administration is now tasked with reporting this data to the Board along with the total number of applicants for any posted position, the number of finalists for that position, and the number of finalists of color. As stated in our previous response, our written hiring policies, informed by anti-bias training, will be published within the first semester of the 2020-21 school year.

Creating an admissions event for families of color:
We will host our first event geared towards prospective families of color in the fall. The Admissions offices and the OCE are looking forward to collaborating on this project.
**Hate speech added to the handbook:**
We are revising the handbook to include hate speech and its definition to our current guidelines for the start of the school year. As of 2019, all high school students are required to sign the Student Life Agreement which explicitly outlines the ban of hate speech. We are developing similar language and agreements in the Middle School this year.

**Consequences for use of hate speech:**
If the Student Life Agreement and handbook policy around hate speech are violated (for example, if the N-word has been used by anyone in any context, whether uttered or posted on social media), disciplinary action would follow and result in immediate appearance before the Disciplinary Committee, with expulsion the expected, but not the only, possible outcome. This language will be included in the 2020-21 update of the handbook. Additionally, the Student Community Board (SCB), established as of 2019, is the result of one action item created to respond to concerns around inequity in discipline. The SCB addresses violations of the Student Life Agreement (SLA) through restorative practice to hold individuals accountable to their actions and to restore them back to the community after redressing harm. Much like the Disciplinary Committee, outcomes of the SCB meetings and consequences are communicated to the student body. Our initial group of student representatives to the SCB have done round one of restorative justice training.

**Representation on Student Faculty Council and Disciplinary Committee:**
In the 2019-20 school year, 6 students of color (including 4 black students) out of 15 served on the Student Faculty Council (SFC). The previous year, 4 students of color (including 2 black students) out of 17 students were members, and in 2017-18, the council had 4 students of color (including 1 black student) out of 10 total students. Students apply to be on the SFC and the Disciplinary Committee, and the administration is committed to more deliberate outreach to affinity groups and the Student Diversity Council to ensure a diverse group of applicants.
In the 2020-21 school year, a third position will be added to the Disciplinary Committee, which will be open to members of the Student Diversity Council, ensuring that the SDC is present in decision-making. As of 2018, three administrators who attend the Disciplinary Committee identify as people of color. Within this examination of policy and practice, both groups will look at intersections of identity beyond racial diversity.

**Communicating antiracist commitment to the HS community:**
As done in the winter of 2018 and the fall of 2019, a formal community meeting has been planned for the fall of 2020 between the offices of Mr. Mahabir and the OCE to clarify policies and expectations, contextualize anti-racism and our mission, and reaffirm the Student Life Agreement. Additional ways to reaffirm our values throughout the year include orientation events, advisory programs, and Community and Diversity classes, among others.

**Accountability for faculty and staff:**
Guidelines established in 2012 require all new faculty to be trained in anti-bias and anti-racism through the Undoing Racism Workshop within their first three years of employment. A goal of the 19-20 school year to get all veteran faculty trained was interrupted by the pandemic. Thus far, 71% of faculty have completed this workshop, with an additional group rescheduling for this fall.
In a recent partnership with other independent schools, new white-identified faculty undergo training through Critical Analysis of Race and Learning in Education, and new faculty of color are offered training with facilitators from the Center for Racial Justice in Education, before the start of the school year.

Finally, through the office of the Assistant Head of School, the Evaluation Committee is creating a method of tracking professional development for faculty and staff to prioritize equity. And the administration is exploring ways restorative practices can help redress harm caused between teachers and students.

**Communicating our commitments and values to 9th grade students:**
While this year’s orientation will be different due to COVID-19, we are committed to working with the Deans to expand the community and diversity piece, with the help of senior Peer Leaders. Curricular reinforcement is provided by a mandatory semester of Community and Diversity classes in the first half of the year.

**Community and Diversity Classes:**
Our new schedule in 2020-2021 will allow us to extend Community and Diversity classes in the 9th and 10th grades over the course of a full semester, and develop additional community days to deepen work done in the courses. As of the 2019-20 school year, all CD9 classes have been scheduled for the first semester, and are followed by a required class in CD10. 11th and 12th grade students are required to take a semester-long DEI-focused course of their choice. Thus, students are now required to take at least three diversity-focused courses in order to graduate.

**Checking in with students of color:**
Starting this school year, volunteer division liaisons, working in tandem with the OCE, will allow for recurring check-ins with students of color throughout the school. The liaison position will be staffed by trained faculty members from each division who will be able to amplify any concerns from the students to the OCE.

**11th and 12th grade curricular requirements:**
Our approach to ensuring that all students experience curricula that addresses race, racism, and representation of marginalized voices is through examining each department’s work, rather than solely through specialized or siloed courses, knowing that specific courses on marginalized identities are also available as electives. This is an ongoing challenge, and therefore we will be continuing to evaluate two academic departments each year who will undergo a self study and present their findings to the Education Committee of the Board. As of 2017, each department must assess how they are working towards our school’s anti-racism goals. Follow up is tracked through the Assistant Head and the OCE in order to help maintain accountability. In this way, all students will be required to learn about the lens antiracism brings to all subject matters.

**Protection from retaliation:**
From our Personnel Handbook: “The School will not retaliate in any way against an individual who makes a report of perceived harassment; nor will we permit any supervisor or employee to do so. Retaliation is a serious violation of the School’s harassment policy and anyone who feels they have been subjected to any acts of retaliation should immediately report such conduct. Any person who retaliates against another individual for reporting any perceived acts of harassment will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including discharge.”
Expanding the MLK Symposium:
In the 2020-2021 school year, we have scheduled additional time to develop our MLK Symposium and ancillary programs that will take place in our January “community week.” We look forward to collaborating with students to develop this program further in the fall.