



October 17, 2020

To the Taft Community,

As I have shared in many emails, calls, texts and webinars, our nation's reckoning with systemic racism catalyzed our own institutional reflection—and that has been a good and needed thing, if also difficult and even painful. The conversations have impacted me personally, just as they have all members of our community. My hope was that we would never lose sight of what mattered: that every Taft student, teacher and staff felt they *belonged* and had the chance to thrive in an inclusive, safe and respectful learning community. That is not too much to ask, and we must continue to commit to that goal.

And the conversations led to immediate change. This letter is an attempt to bring you up to date on the work we undertook this summer, the work we have started this academic year, and work we see in the future.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Planning Committee (DEISPC)

During the summer, the Board of Trustees committed to a strategic planning process around DEI issues, and that work has begun with the formation of the DEISPC, which includes a diverse group of faculty, staff, alumni, trustees and parents. The committee is co-chaired by Trustee Jacqueline Rosa, who brings two decades of corporate experience in diversity practice, and Dean of Multicultural Education Andrew Prince.

The DEISPC's charge is as follows: "The DEISPC is tasked to make recommendations which set the strategic direction for the school to ensure that it can meet its goal of the education of the whole student and, by necessity, to being a safe, inclusive community where all members are valued, respected and belong."

The DEISPC has been tasked to accomplish three things. First, in order to establish a baseline understanding for all community members, it will conduct a comprehensive audit of the school's DEI status in all areas of school function. Second, the committee will draft short and long term recommendations for changes in the various areas of school life. Third, in order to ensure accountability, the committee should establish mechanisms to measure future progress.

The DEISPC will meet throughout the year and report out to the community once a semester. I

believe this will be one of the most important *ad hoc* committees the school has had. The committee is excited, motivated and committed—and already at work.

Data Gathering, Community Surveying, and Benchmarking

We know that gathering data is critical for any organization as it seeks to improve and change. For years we have been committed to this process, and we see the work of benchmarking, against our peers and our ideal, as vital. Data we have gathered over time is used currently in various areas of school function.

Taft has administered school life surveys as part of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges decennial accreditation process on each of its last three occasions, and the findings were used to shape policy and practices in many areas of school life, including DEI work. In addition, we have administered the Independent School Health Check (ISHC), most recently in 2019. The ISHC is a 45-minute 100-question anonymous survey which takes a comprehensive look at student behavior and attitudes and then aggregates the results compared to the ISHC national database in diverse areas of student life: sleep, ethnicity, gender identity, substance use, academic pressure, social life, bullying, etc. In addition, Taft administered the National Association of Independent Schools AIM (Assessment of Inclusivity and Multiculturalism) Survey in 2017, and we are committed to doing so approximately every five years. The AIM study is a lengthy and comprehensive instrument which delivers quantitative and qualitative data that helps measure progress in meeting goals, success of various initiatives, and areas of need. Finally, the DEISPC will be administering a DEI survey as part of its work this year, with the idea that it will be repeated each year in order to provide fresh data on our progress towards our goals.

Board of Trustees Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Training

At the September Board of Trustees meeting, the board took part in a DEI program, led by Andrew Prince, which focused on microaggressions, cultural competency, and difficult conversations. The program mirrored several of the modules the faculty undertook this summer and involved case studies from the "Black at Taft" Instagram account, small group discussion and reflection. The Board plans to participate in ongoing programming and will be working with experienced diversity practitioners.

School Counselor

Taft has a highly effective counseling department, with three full-time counselors with a combined sixty years of experience. In recent years, students of color have asked for additional support.

In order to deepen the work of the office and better serve students of color, Taft has partnered with Dr. Roland Davis (MSW, Ph. D) from the Stanley King Institute (SKI), which offers training for teachers and schools in counseling and listening skills, student culture, and inclusion and equity work. SKI has partnered closely and strategically with Taft over recent years, with multiple campus visits for meetings and workshops.

Dr. Davis has been a leader in DEI educational work. His doctorate work focused on understanding the experience of students of color at predominantly white institutions and he has served as