



June 2, 2020

Dear Brooks School Community Members,

As we move from an unprecedented spring to a summer full of uncertainty about what lies ahead in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic that has claimed more than 100,000 American lives, we are also wrestling with the pain and frustration that has followed the tragic killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis last week. This, of course, is far from the first time an African-American man, in particular, and a person of color, in general, has been the victim of violent racism that continues to plague this country. Yet again, we find ourselves grasping for a way forward to a more just and equitable society.

One of the pernicious effects of being physically apart through this spring has been the inability to be on campus together and support one another in a time of crisis. This has felt especially true over the past few days, with our community completing a virtual spring, moving into a summer likely to be more isolating than others, and all of us beyond arm's reach from one another. Thus, it feels more important than ever to be in touch at a time that shakes us so profoundly. In that spirit, I would like to share three thoughts and hopes I have been carrying over the past week:

First, I have thought about our community, its values, its imperfections, and its need to see this moment in time as one that calls all of us to do and be better. One of our core values is empathy -- the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. The challenge ahead is less about whether we can understand and share the feelings of members of our community, and much more about what we will do with that understanding. If our school community is to be a part of a broader solution this country so desperately needs, we must be vigilant and uncompromising in our pursuit of justice, equity, inclusion, and full belonging for all who are a part of it.

Second, at a time when racially motivated aspersions of all sorts have been cast about in callous fashion to blame "others" for the current circumstances we are enduring, I have thought about our collective commitment to being well above the mean-spirited banter that is all too common in our national discourse. We are a school full of many differences and a wide array of talents and passions. Our lives are enriched by these differences, talents and passions. We believe in the fundamental dignity of every member of this community. The need to be committed to ensuring we are active in doing our part to make good on this belief has never been more important than it is now. This is a time when we need to ascend to a higher plane, and make clear our firm commitment to taking great care of one another. This must matter to all of us.

Third, we live at a time where too many people of color have too many reasons to wonder about their safety. Therefore, I want to be as explicit as I can about Brooks School's abhorrence for the conduct that led to George Floyd's death, and the vile sentiment that fueled it. At our school, there is no place for any racist, bigoted, or hateful behavior or sentiment, and our resolve to ensure this is the case has never been greater.

Bryan Stevenson is a hero of mine. He is the executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, and also a professor of law at New York University Law School. His life's work has been centered on defending those who have been wrongly convicted of crimes, and advocating for anti-poverty and anti-discrimination legislation aimed at loosening the firm grip debilitating inequality continues to hold in the United States. He once wrote:

"We are all implicated when we allow other people to be mistreated. An absence of compassion can corrupt the decency of a community, a state, a nation."

My hope is that the events of the past week will lead our country to refuse to be implicated in such blatant mistreatment of other human beings. Let this be the time when we find the deepest reaches of our collective compassion, and move in the direction of fulfilling our promise of actually being a just and equitable society. At Brooks, we stand ready to do our part.

I hope all of you continue to be safe and well in the midst of this very challenging year. Take good care.

Best,

John R. Packard  
Head of School

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