



November 6, 2020

Dear Brooks School Community Members,

As we close in on the end of a week that has drawn a great deal of feeling and emotion to the surface at school and across the country, I am glad to have this opportunity to be in touch. To start, I want to extend my wish and hope that all of you are safe and well. Regardless of how the protracted process of determining who the president-elect will be in the United States ultimately lands, the polarization of the country appears to be more deeply rooted than ever before. In my view, this reality underlines the importance of the reason for this letter and update. This is a time when being clear about institutional values and aspirations is profoundly important.

[On June 18](#), I wrote to the Brooks community in response to an outpouring of personal experience, sentiment, and deep desire for our school to act in ways that would directly confront the effects of systemic racism on our campus, in particular, and in this country, in general.

I am writing to you today for two reasons: First, I want to reiterate the school's commitment to anti-racism, and our alignment with the Black Lives Matter movement and all efforts seeking to achieve equity and justice for the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) community. Second, I would like to follow up and update much of what we shared with all of you in that June 18 letter. This feels like an important moment in time to be emphatic about our need to be vigilant and intentional in our ongoing effort to realize equity and inclusion for all members of our community.

I would also add that here at school, beyond presidential politics, we are now well into the second half of a first semester unlike any the school has ever experienced. While the norm has become a steady state of uncertainty about how we will continue to make our way to the end of the 2020-2021 school year, there is no uncertainty about how wonderful and important it has been to be back in school and together again -- in person, on screens, and in all ways that have helped us support one another through a challenging time. The collective resilience of students, faculty, staff, parents, guardians, and trustees, has been an inspiration, and perhaps never before have we appreciated time together as much as we do now.

The hope with our June 18 letter was to share where our school was at that point in time in its diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) effort. We endeavored to do so honestly, clearly, and transparently, and also signal initial commitments we were making moving forward. In the time that has elapsed since being in touch with all of you as the summer was beginning, we have worked hard to listen and learn from a range of conversations with individuals and groups that are ongoing. We share what

follows mindful of the fact that any effort to realize a deeper level of equity and inclusion for all members of our community requires institutional persistence. In the course of moving some initiatives forward, engaging in professional development work, and aiming to elevate our collective commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion at Brooks, we are in the early stages of realizing a number of commitments we named in June. To be clear, there is still a great deal of work to do. Our hope is to stay in touch periodically, indicate where we are, invite ongoing conversation, and draw from our extended community as the work to deliver on our commitment to anti-racism continues.

To start, I would like to share an overview of some of what we have been doing and working on since we were last in touch on June 18:

Governance and Leadership:

We made reference in June to the creation of a trustee-level DEI Committee now chaired by Cristina E. Antelo '95 and Belisario Rosas P'15, P'21. The following trustees are serving on this committee: Cheryl M. Duckworth P'22, P'23, Nancy C. Ferry P'21, Steven R. Gorham '85, P'17, P'21, Booth D. Kyle '89, Sally T. Milliken '88, P'22, P'24, John R. Packard H'87, P'18, P'21, and Julianne G. Spencer '93. The co-chairs of this group have been attending a range of committee and community meetings at school over these four months, and we invite all community members to be in touch with this committee directly, with any questions, suggestions, and concerns you may want to direct to them. You can reach the group by email at boardDEI@brooksschool.com.

At its fall meetings in late September, the board of trustees made a commitment to add at least two trustees of color by July 1, 2021. At present, the [28-member board of trustees](#) includes four people of color. Currently, we are engaged in initial conversations with candidates and will look forward to updating our progress later in the year. In addition, the alumni board has formed a DEI advisory group for purposes of engaging in efforts to support initiatives on campus and to focus on adding alumni and alumnae of color to its ranks. The group has appointed a DEI liaison (Abby Skinner '14) to help foster collaboration between the alumni board and alumni groups who are working with the school on action items and our need to move this work forward.

While our hiring process has not yet started for any new senior administrative or faculty positions for 2021-2022, we have expanded the school's [DEI Team](#) since we were last in touch on June 18. Ashley Johnston has continued her work as [Dean of Community Life](#). Kenya Jones stepped into a new role as [Director of Multicultural Affairs and Outreach](#). And, Michael Veit was named [Director of DEI Curriculum and Programming](#). The DEI Team has been actively engaged in collaborating with peers serving in diversity practitioner roles at other schools, working with and supporting student affinity groups on campus, bringing important professional development programs to our campus, engaging with academic affairs and student affairs colleagues at school, and meeting routinely with Associate Head for Faculty Affairs John McVeigh and me. We will have more to share about 2021-2022 hiring later in the year.

Professional Development:

Beyond ongoing work done in committees and subcommittees over the summer and fall, the school's employees and faculty have engaged in a range of professional development steps aimed at broadening and elevating our collective engagement in

DEI work. The school's success at realizing commitments aimed at embedding a culture of anti-racism at our school depends on all of us having access to training and educational opportunities that will equip us to make impactful progress. In addition to some of what you will find in the link to our report on the current status of commitments we identified on June 18, we are also looking forward to continuing and beginning work with groups and individuals we are excited to learn from.

Over the course of the fall, the school was pleased to have 15 employees attend The Association of Independent Schools of New England (AISNE) [Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Conference](#). We are also grateful to have four faculty members (Ashley Johnston, Chelsea Clater, Babs Wheelden, Leigh Perkins) attending coaching sessions with [Dr. Ali Michael](#) to help prepare them to lead white anti-racist learning spaces with the goal of creating a white anti-racist group for adults on campus. Finally, I have been glad to be a part of a [Heads of School Anti-Racism working group](#) that has been and will continue to be meeting periodically through the fall and winter. AISNE is coordinating these conversations facilitated by an impressive group of DEI consultants and school practitioners. The sessions have been excellent.

Looking forward, I would emphasize two steps still to come that are certain to add depth and range to our work:

First, after researching and meeting with a number of organizations, the school's DEI Team recently retained the [Suffolk University Center for Restorative Justice](#) to provide training to this group and the school's senior administrative team with the goal of better equipping all of us to handle bias grievances in the future. We are looking forward to all we are certain to learn in this training over the next few months.

Second, as a result of one of the professional development programs employees were a part of in late August, Associate Director of Alumni Relations Carly Churchill '10 connected with [Cecilia Ramirez '01](#), who currently works as Chief of Staff at Equal Justice USA, and has been a race equity trainer and practitioner for more than 15 years. We are thrilled to have retained Cecilia to consult with the school in its effort to advance our DEI work on campus. Her work will include serving as a race equity coach and resource to our board of trustees, senior administrators, DEI Team, and me. In addition, she will help us assess data we will gather from the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) [Assessment of Inclusivity and Multiculturalism \(AIM\)](#), which we are in the process of distributing to the whole school community. Finally, she will partner with the school to design racial equity workshops we will identify and pursue as the year evolves.

Policy and Protocol Development:

As we began engaging in work towards realizing commitments we signaled on June 18, a focal point for the school and DEI Team over the summer was on moving a substantial amount of policy and protocol creation forward. This included work led by our DEI Mission Statement Committee on a [DEI Mission Statement](#) that now resides on the school's website. In addition, a subcommittee of the [Diversity Leadership Council](#) (DLC) wrote an [anti-racism statement](#) over the summer that is now included in the student handbook. The DEI Team developed bias grievance protocols in order to ensure community members have recourse in circumstances where micro- and macro-aggressions occur. While there are structural and professional development steps ahead that will allow us to more formally establish these protocols, the DEI Team has been able to handle grievances that have surfaced this school year. Finally, we shared the school's [land acknowledgment](#) in our June 18 letter, and have used it through the

fall at school gatherings and while we are celebrating [National Native American Heritage Month](#) this November. The challenge, responsibility, and opportunity the school have moving forward is to adhere to both the letter and spirit of policies and statements we create, and to continually refine protocols we develop aimed at fostering a culture of anti-racism on our campus.

Status of June 18 DEI Initial Commitments:

In our June 18 letter, the school made a number of initial commitments with realizing a culture of anti-racism on our campus in mind. While we have started to move in the direction of fulfilling these commitments, we remain in the early stages of this work in a number of instances. Thus, the aspirations we have with regard to these commitments are in some way more prominent than what has been realized and implemented at this point. Furthermore, the impact the work we are doing will have on students and adults studying, working, and living at Brooks is hard to discern at this stage. We are looking forward to continuing to gather feedback through formal and informal channels in ways that illuminate the efficacy of our efforts, and inform decisions on how to move forward most effectively. To be honest with ourselves in ongoing and informed ways about whether our efforts are achieving greater equity and inclusion for all members of our community is at the center of our thinking. You can access our current view on the status of the initial commitments we signaled in June [HERE](#).

Earlier this month, I enjoyed the privilege of hearing former Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick speak to a group of Heads of School. His story and talk were inspiring, and his many accomplishments and contributions to a greater good for all throughout his life speak for themselves. He earned a scholarship to independent school through A Better Chance (ABC) in much the same way that many of our students have at Brooks over the years. He knows racial and social injustice personally, and has spent his life confronting forces that have sustained these conditions for the BIPOC community.

Among many others, he shared one thought that has stayed with me: In what was a broad discussion about racial and social injustice in the United States, and what independent schools can and need to do to address systemic racism, Governor Patrick asked all of us to reconsider a common refrain during the COVID-19 pandemic. Namely, our wish to "return to normal" on the other side of what we are all enduring now. As the country and world wrestle with a relatively new pandemic driven by a deadly virus, and a racial inequality pandemic that has been with us for centuries, Governor Patrick urged us to not return to any version of normal that has perpetuated the painful inequities that have prevented this country from being true to its highest ideals. As we move forward in pursuit of commitments we have made, and define additional commitments we will make, much of how we do with the challenge and responsibility we have will rest on how we work together with the "new" normal Governor Patrick encouraged us to pursue in mind. There is and will be important institutional and individual discomfort along the way, and therein is the opportunity for the school to keep finding its way to higher ground.

I want to close by again expressing our deep appreciation for your engagement, your wisdom, and your desire to partner with the school over these past four months. We have been inspired by the courage and care so many have displayed and shared. Our sights are set on continuing to work in the direction of realizing a culture of anti-racism in our community. We look forward to staying in touch.

Sincerely,

John R. Packard
Head of School

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