



## **A Message from the Head of School**

*Friday, June 19, 2020*

Today is Juneteenth — a holiday that, for many of us, has just now entered our consciousness. My work today includes ensuring that the significance of the day is not merely acknowledged in passing, but is part of the meaningful and relentless elevation of anti-racist work in our community and in our country.

I write to you as a follow-up to my previous letter concerning the death of George Floyd and other senseless killings of Black citizens in our country.

Over the last several weeks, I have heard from many of you — current students, parents, faculty, and alumni (including an overwhelming majority of the Class of 2020). In your messages, you have expressed your desire to see, and be a part of, *action* within the school and in the broader community. I acknowledge that those of us who identify as white are learning and are working to understand the implications of whiteness more deeply; and I know it is critical that, as an institution, we take the time to reflect on our own practices and *do more* and *do better* in our anti-racist work.

That work is already underway. At the administrative and faculty levels, we have had multiple conversations over these last few weeks, beginning a comprehensive review of all aspects of school life — curriculum, scheduling, hiring, professional development, culture, safety, parent support, policies and procedures, and more — in order to identify specific actions and opportunities.

We have also reached out to a broader community of independent schools and diversity practitioners. First and foremost, we want to be thinking about the lived experience of our own students, employees, and families — but we also want to make sure we are considering other similar institutions and how they are challenging themselves to do more. I must acknowledge the work of Courtney Rollins, Park's Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). In addition to his work directly with K–12 students and faculty over the last several years, Courtney has kept all aspects of DEI practice in front of the senior administrative team.

In the interest of continuing to provide resources to our community, I want to share a few writings that you might consider. First, Park graduate Glenn Singleton '82 is a leader in the field of uncovering personal and institutional biases that prevent all people, and especially people of color, from reaching their fullest potential. He is the author of *Courageous Conversations About Race*, a resource that we have used in our work here at Park. Alumnus R. Eric Thomas '99 recently wrote a compelling piece entitled *It Does Not Matter If You Are Good — On Omar Jimenez, George Floyd, Christian Cooper and the myth of being non-threatening*. Eric writes of having to always be prepared to smile and to make sure white people know he is good. We, at Park, cannot ignore the fact that he, of course, must have had to learn and practice that behavior while a student here. And this week, Park parent Dr. Chris Lebron wrote a powerful op-ed — *White America Wants Me to Conform. I Won't Do It* — in the *New York Times* about his experiences in life and, specifically, in academia, navigating predominantly white institutions of higher learning.

I hope you will engage with the pieces above — especially given the close connections of the authors to our community.

*At The Park School of Baltimore, the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion is the responsibility of every member of the community; the benefits of that work are an enriched society, a thriving community, and a brighter future for each individual.* This introduction to Park School's Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion establishes an important and broad expectation of each of us.

I write to you today to not only affirm this expectation in light of the nationwide reckoning regarding race, but to explicitly say to, and for, our community: every white person — administrator, teacher, staff member, parent, student, and alumnus — must take anti-racist action. We have to listen. We must support one another. We have to get uncomfortable, sometimes angry. We must do this work on behalf of all current and future Park School students, and for our society.

I hope you will continue to provide your feedback. We teach our kids to be critical thinkers. We teach our students to advocate for what is right.

I look forward to sharing more about our work as a school later in the summer. In the meantime, I hope you follow the charge that I gave the Class of 2020 — in the words of U.S. Congressman and Civil Rights leader John Lewis, make “*good trouble*.”

Sincerely,

*Dan Paradis*, Head of School