



SEWICKLEY ACADEMY

FOR WHO YOU ARE. FOR WHO YOU WILL BECOME.

June 2, 2020

A Message from the Head of School

Dear Sewickley Academy Community,

In a time of global pandemic, the United States finds itself, once again, facing the unresolved issue of racism in our country. In the past couple of weeks, a truth has been driven powerfully home: racism kills. This is not a metaphor; this is the truth, and the lives lost, now including George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, are the incalculable cost we continue to pay for maintaining systems in our country that privilege some and oppress and dehumanize others.

I am deeply saddened by these most recent losses. These deaths are tragic and senseless, and the outpouring of anger and calls for justice are ones that we must heed. No longer can we ignore the facts of oppression and racism that continue to plague virtually every community in our country.

So what are we to do? I write as a person with race privilege (among many others). My position demands that I lift up my voice and join with others to say enough! A good friend of mine once said, "Racism is not a black people's problem to solve – it is a white people's problem to solve." I think, in the main, that is true, and yet I suspect that the path forward will require a partnership among all people, coming together in solidarity to do the work necessary to move us forward as a society. As a start, we need to band together to dismantle the structures that oppress and disempower.

If we do not want a society roiled by anger and violence, then we need to examine the root causes and move swiftly to address those causes. I do not condone violence or the destruction of property, but we must take seriously what moves people to anger and violence rather than merely condemn them for behaviors we cannot tolerate as a society.

The challenges we face as a society are real and profound, and they will not be overcome in a day. However, they will never be overcome if we persist in blaming the victims and in perpetuating – indeed exacerbating – the structures of oppression that keep so many of our fellow citizens from realizing their rightful place in society.

At Sewickley Academy we have done and will continue to do our part to raise awareness and educate our students so that they can see injustice and so that they can become part of the solution. We have also committed ourselves to supporting the growth of our faculty and staff. Minds must change, and so must hearts, but this is only possible if we create the spaces where positive, constructive, affirming dialogue can take place.

While progress has been made, more needs to be done. Until we can realize the dream that Martin Luther King Jr. had for his children, that they be judged by the content of their character and not by the color of their skin, we must resist racism. We

must protest. We must say enough. More than that, we must act and do the hard things that need to be done to create a more equitable and just society for all, not just for some. And the only way we will make progress is by addressing the one thing that has always kept this country from achieving the true fulfillment of her extraordinary promise: racism and the legacy of slavery that haunts us even to this day.

To that end, I want to invite the entire Sewickley Academy community to join me in raising our own awareness and developing our own skills. There are a number of books that have recently been published that could provide a basis for shared conversation. If we all choose one to read over the summer, we can take some important steps to do our part in thinking about how we can become part of the solution to our nation's problem with racism, and we can model for our children what life-long learning looks like. I offer the following titles for your consideration:

How to be an Antiracist, by Ibram X. Kendi
The Person You Mean to Be, by Dolly Chugh
Biased, by Jennifer Eberhardt

This fall, we will organize book discussion groups so that we can come together with others who have done the same reading to reflect on what we have learned – and how we can put that learning to use.

In sadness and solidarity, and with a willingness to do my part,



Kolia O'Connor
Head of School