



# KINGSWOOD OXFORD

April 2021

Dear Wyvern Community,

This letter accompanies an update that outlines some of the work we have done this year toward our goal of becoming a more inclusive school where every student feels a sense of belonging. It has been a challenging and profound year for our country as we have dealt with the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and ongoing racial discrimination. Martin Luther King famously said that the *“arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”* I think the recent verdict in the murder trial of Derek Chauvin shows that it bends towards justice, but it takes work and a sustained commitment to get it there. Indeed, we are prone to shift our attention and move on to something else once a law has been passed and progress has been made. For example, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments were supposed to bring equality to emancipated slaves after the Civil War. Yet, freed slaves were denied their rights and subjected to violence and lynchings for the next 100 years. Despite progress made through the Civil Rights Act of 1964, subtle forms of discrimination continue in housing, voting rights, and our system of justice today.

As we sail together toward our “north star,” there are at least three obstacles I believe we will need to overcome. First, it will take sustained commitment. This is not a day trip we take out on the lake but rather a long journey across a vast ocean. We will be tempted to “move on” to our other priorities or perhaps throw the anchor down and accept a destination short of our true destination. This is one of the reasons we have established a permanent Board Committee on Equity and Inclusion to help hold us accountable and keep the ship sailing forward. Our students deserve this, and our mission demands it of us.

A second threat comes within the context of our current strained political and cultural climate. There are stormy seas ahead and winds that threaten to blow us off course, either east or west. Not everyone will agree with every initiative or program we employ - some may want more, others less. But we are committed to ensuring the well-being of all of our students and creating a kinder, more inclusive school. We also remain committed to the core academic strengths, to open dialogue, and the belief that a school is a place where students learn to embrace the discomfort of competing ideas.

These two goals are not mutually exclusive. Though it is challenging to sail straight ahead while buffeted by the political crosswinds, we can do this together if we approach this work with trust, patience, and empathy. And we will need all hands on deck.

The final obstacle is that we need the necessary resources to support this work. Our ship won't go anywhere without a steady wind in our sails. We are grateful to the many families who have reached out to the School asking how they can support us in our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, and I am very pleased to announce a generous gift from the Conrad family, a KO family with deep Wyvern roots. **The Christopher Conrad Fund for Social Justice**, named in honor of their late son and brother, will support faculty professional development, student projects, curriculum development, and visiting speakers and artists that will help us move closer to our destination.

Last summer, we made a renewed commitment to becoming a more inclusive school and established goals toward that end. These include expanding our curriculum to bring in additional representation, making sure our students understand the origins of ongoing discrimination, bolstering our DEI professional development, and reviewing our hiring practices, among other things. Our website serves as an update on the areas where the school has made progress and still needs to grow. We know we are not there yet, but we are committed to continuing to sail toward that north star, where we believe there is an even better version of ourselves and our community.

When you build an inclusive environment that values and understands the historical challenges and experiences of all, we all grow and become bigger and better people. Our goals are to eliminate inequities where they exist, ensure that all our students feel a sense of belonging, and help them develop into strong, culturally competent, and insightful young adults. With these tools, they will be better prepared to understand, lead, and communicate in challenging times like these, in a way that supports all constituents and brings about positive change for the future.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership.

In peace,

Tom Dillow  
Head of School

Doug Harris '77  
Trustee and Chair, DEI Committee

