

## **A Memo to Severn School to Support Students of Color and Implement Anti-Racist Learning**

### **Recommendation:**

In an increasingly globalized and multicultural society, it is necessary to prepare students for conversations regarding diversity, inclusion, and equity. It is fundamentally irresponsible to allow students to graduate from high school without a solid understanding of race and racism in the United States, as these are necessary skills to become successful both in college and in the workforce, and are essential in becoming a well-educated, moral individual. Currently, Severn School students are systematically being underprepared in engaging in these topics, both academically and socially. In order to better prepare students, we recommend the following changes:

- **Establish and articulate a clear disciplinary framework for holding students accountable when racist acts occur**
- **Hire a full-time Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) professional to act as a resource for both students and faculty and to facilitate professional development for faculty**
- **Implement a mandatory, semester-long course on Race in America, which is taught in the students' incoming year by the DEI professional**
- **Actively pursue increasing the number of faculty of color in all departments as well as pursuing efforts to increase the number of students of color in the student body**
- **Explore ways in which all departments, and especially History, can incorporate topics of racial justice in lessons**
- **Increase transparency regarding Severn School's endowment and make statistics about diversity publicly available**

### **The Need for Reform:**

Severn School's Mission Statement reads:

**"Severn School challenges its students to pursue excellence in character, conduct, and scholarship, to marshal the courage to lead, and to develop the lasting desire to serve and achieve. We believe this is best realized in a community where adults model these qualities and where each student is known and valued."**

The Inclusion Statement reads:

**"Severn aspires to be an inclusive community where each person is welcomed and affirmed. We find strength and value in our similarities and differences thereby inspiring students and adults to participate in and sustain a vibrant exchange of ideas and perspectives. In designing thoughtful programs and practices, we will broaden a culture of belonging and respect and an appreciation for the complexities within ourselves and others, and foster the desire to participate in a dynamic, global society."**

Both the Mission and Inclusion Statements express a commitment to fostering a sense of cross-cultural understanding and appreciation in the school's student body. Indeed, these statements are positive affirmations of the value of diversity in education. Yet, at the same time, they raise several questions for further discussion: How is "excellence in character and conduct" defined and embodied in students' daily lives? How do students "marshal the courage to lead" effectively, and whom do they lead? What does a "community where each person is welcomed and affirmed" and "a culture of belonging and respect" look like in practice?

In order to successfully embody the ideals outlined in the Mission and Inclusion statements, Severn School administrators and faculty must answer these questions. Although principles of diversity, inclusion, and equity seem to be realized on paper, in practice, this is not the case. Simply put, **Severn School currently does not meet the needs of students of color, and especially does not offer the necessary support systems for black students.** When asked to recount instances of experiencing racism at school, many black students described being called monkeys by their classmates and hearing the n-word used on multiple occasions. One student recalls, "One time in History class, a group of monkeys appeared on the screen and the person next to me said that that was me and my family."<sup>1</sup> In another instance, a student recalls how another student wrote the n-word in the school basement for the amusement of his friends.

**Such instances of overt racism reveal that the school's mission of creating a space where "each student is known and valued" fails to be realized in practice.** Simultaneously, even if we were to treat such instances of racism as "outliers," Severn School still implicitly perpetuates systemic injustices. The Severn School community is predominantly white, affluent, able-bodied, and cis-gendered. Automatically, the nature of the school's composition acts as a bubble and makes students blind to many aspects of privilege. Ranging from a history curriculum that centers around the narratives and accomplishments of powerful white men, being taught by a predominantly white faculty, to having a majority-white administration, many aspects of white supremacy and hegemony are ingrained in Severn School students. We acknowledge that that we all harbor internalized racism simply by living in a racist society, and such internal biases need to be critically examined and unlearned.

It is our duty to educate ourselves and listen to marginalized voices so that we can become more aware of the society in which we live and so that we can strive towards becoming better accomplices in dismantling systemic racism. **To not do so would be to fall short of a key tenet of Severn School's Mission Statement: develop a lasting desire to serve and achieve.** Within this framework, we challenge Severn School to define character, conduct, and leadership in terms of self-awareness, humility, embracing difference, and amplifying the voices of those around them. Students cannot successfully "participate in a dynamic, global society" without exhibiting these skills.

What follows in this proposal are suggestions which should advance the goal of embracing diversity and supporting all students. We hope that these changes, which emphasize

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A, "Current Student Testimonials," for all of the students' experiences

learning anti-racism, begin a dialogue in the community and provide students with various frameworks and concrete actions to exhibit anti-racism in their daily lives.

### **Suggestions:**

#### ***Establish and articulate a clear disciplinary framework for holding students accountable when racist acts occur***

As the student testimonials made abundantly clear, racist behavior exists both explicitly and implicitly at Severn School. There needs to be a clear disciplinary framework that defines what constitutes racist behavior and actions, and how students are held accountable when such behavior occurs.

In the 2019-2020 Upper School Division Handbook, “race” appears only once, and any mention of “racist behavior” is notably absent. In the “Major School Rules,” there is no mention of hate speech.<sup>2</sup> The only time in which the handbook discusses the use of racial slurs is in the Use of Technology Policy, which maintains that students should “refrain from making defamatory remarks, sexual or racial slurs, and from using obscene or profane language.”<sup>3</sup> There are several problems contained within the statement. First, the word “refrain” does not reflect the gravity of such behavior; a more appropriate statement should clearly prohibit such behavior. Second, “racial slurs,” which only appears under the Acceptable Use of Technology Subsection, should appear in a separate and detailed subsection about racism under Safety and Security. Similarly, when examples of harassment are mentioned in the Handbook, there is no mention of hate speech or any other form of racial harassment.<sup>4</sup> While it is important to recognize the impact of defamatory remarks and sexual slurs, because racism exists in every aspect of our society, **it deserves special attention and thus needs to be addressed in its own section.**

There is a seemingly contradictory relationship between the Inclusion Statement’s commitment to diversity and the Student Handbook’s lack of accountability involving racist behavior. How can the community expect to uphold the values of a “culture of belonging and respect” without clear guidelines for taking action when members fall short?

In contrast, the Student Handbook clearly defines the Honor Code and how infractions against the Honor Code are disciplined. Severn School devotes a great deal of effort and time in teaching students what constitutes Honor Code violations, which include yearly presentations of plagiarism cases, signing the Honor Code on every assignment, and the annual Honor Code Assembly, in which all new students sign the Honor Code Book. Indeed, the Honor Code is often discussed as an essential part of the school community and fundamental to the development of character.

We envision a disciplinary framework that functions similarly to the current Honor Code system. Just as faculty members are expected, and students are encouraged, to report Honor

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<sup>2</sup> Upper School Division Handbook, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Upper School Division Handbook, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Upper School Division Handbook, 48.

Code violations to the Dean of Students, members of the community must hold each other accountable in matters concerning racist behavior. Additionally, the Student Handbook must include a specific section that clearly defines racist behavior and provides some examples, which could include hate speech, racist imagery, and slurs. Explicitly establishing this standard creates a social contract among community members.

When implementing such a framework, several aspects should be considered:

- The disciplinary process should prioritize the needs and wishes of the student who is targeted, and it should not be carried out in such a way that creates more pain for the targeted individual. **While it is important to consider the circumstances of the offender, at no point should the circumstances serve to mitigate the severity of such behavior.**
- The disciplinary action should simultaneously recognize the severity and impact of such action while also emphasizing the need for restorative justice and healing the community.
- Disciplinary action should be carried out in a way that does not excuse or dismiss the behavior of the offender, but it should also be viewed as a moment for self-reflection and education. For example, one disciplinary action could be a suspension that requires reading a book on white privilege and writing a personal reflection essay and apology in order to be readmitted to the school.
- Special consideration should be given to the age of the offending student. For example, there can be more leeway given to a freshman student who is new to the school; an appropriate disciplinary action would be essay writing described previously. In contrast, there should be harsher punishments for students who are older and should know better. For example, there needs to be a stronger disciplinary action against juniors and seniors. To not do so would be to poorly prepare students for college, as racist behavior in college has even more serious implications, which can include immediate expulsion and involvement of campus police.

Implementing a disciplinary framework that holds students accountable for racist actions is critical for supporting students of color at Severn School. As Severn School strives towards increasing diversity in its student body, it is irresponsible to not explicitly define community standards and expectations, and the failure to do so sends the message that the school does not adequately consider the importance of inclusion and equity.

***Hire a full-time Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) professional to act as a resource for both students and faculty and to facilitate professional development for faculty***

It is imperative that Severn School hire a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion professional to act as a resource for both students and faculty. A faculty member who is specifically trained and designated for inclusion work is a necessary advocate for supporting students of color and

implementing a strong and holistic approach to teaching diversity and inclusion. The DEI professional can also act as a resource for families of color and facilitate the creation of affinity groups within the Severn School community. Furthermore, many of Severn School's peer institutions, including the Indian Creek School, have designated DEI professionals, and hiring a DEI faculty member will make Severn School consistent with its peers.<sup>5</sup>

In hiring a full-time DEI professional, several factors should be considered:

- The DEI professional's qualifications should include a background in K-12 education and potentially psychology. Additionally, the bulk of the DEI professional's experiences should include facilitation and experience working with students. **At the core, the DEI professional should be an advocate for Severn School students, and not an element of public relations for the administration.**
- While it is important for every faculty member to build meaningful relationships with students outside of the classroom, whether through coaching athletics or advising extracurricular activities, it is essential that the DEI professional works full-time in this role. **In other words, any other commitment, such as coaching a sports team, detracts from the DEI professional's primary purpose in the Severn School community and makes the position less effective.**
- Finally, while the DEI faculty member is primarily responsible for organizing professional development and student programming, they should not be the sole person acting in this role. In other words, having a designated DEI professional does not mean that other faculty members should not engage in DEI work. The DEI professional should act as a facilitator, but all faculty members have a duty to educate themselves and explore ways in which they can embody inclusion in their daily lives and in the classroom.

***Implement a mandatory, semester-long course on Race in America, which is taught in the students' incoming year by the DEI professional***

In February 2019, the Anne Arundel Board of Education voted unanimously to implement a mandatory course on diversity, inclusion, and equity for all students in their first year in high school. Beginning in the 2019-2020 school year, enrollment in a course which examines diversity, inclusion, and equity is a mandatory requirement for graduation. Although Severn School's graduation requirements are separate from Anne Arundel County public schools, the school should follow their lead and implement a similar graduation requirement. The course, which may be called "Race in America" should be taught by Severn School's DEI professional, and all first-year students should take it in their first or second semester at the school. **Moreover, "Race in America" should be a semester-long course, and not**

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on how other independent schools incorporate DEI work, see "From Assimilation to Inclusion: How White Educators and Educators of Color Can Make Diversity Work," [http://www.nysais.org/uploaded/Diversity/Making\\_diversity\\_work\\_AISNE.pdf](http://www.nysais.org/uploaded/Diversity/Making_diversity_work_AISNE.pdf).

**incorporated into free-period seminar workshops, to ensure that such issues receive enough time, attention, and priority.**

The course “Race in America” should assume a multi-disciplinary approach to teaching diversity, inclusion, and equity. More specifically, the course should incorporate learning terminology and statistics and understanding sociology as well as different facets of privilege. A major component of the course should focus on ethnic history. Additionally, students should learn about the psychology of oppression and examine white identity. In designing the course, the DEI professional should give special attention to establishing explicit and clear guidelines for discussion among students. As student testimonials have made clear, the relatively homogenous nature of the student body makes it so that students who have views that are different from the majority often feel targeted and especially excluded from the community as a whole. **Guidelines need to be established and clearly communicated to students so that discussions do not target and negatively impact students of color.**

It is critical that students begin to learn and have conversations about diversity, inclusion, and equity as soon as they arrive on campus. “Race in America” should act as a strong foundation and provide students with a solid framework in which they can do more self-study and learn about issues of racial justice in many different settings. Furthermore, students should learn how to have effective, civil, and productive conversations about diversity in a group setting, which is a fundamental skill and will help the community to grow as a whole tremendously.

***Actively pursue increasing the number of faculty of color in all departments***

Although there is no publicly available statistics, the majority of the Severn School faculty are white. While many Severn School teachers are extremely committed to helping and caring for all students, the fairly homogenous composition of the staff presents major blindspots to issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity. Faculty of color offer diverse experiences, understanding, and empathy in every conversation, and having faculty of color who are role models for the community will greatly benefit everyone. As an abundance of educational research and personal accounts of Severn School alumni have made abundantly clear, educational outcomes drastically improve when students have teachers who look like them, **and students feel more included and supported in the community.** For example, in one of the testimonials, a student recalled how excited she was when a math teaching candidate visited the school. She notes, “He was a teacher that taught class just like the other teachers and in some ways even better, and most importantly - he looked like me.”<sup>6</sup> At the same time, it should not fall on faculty of color to assume the burden of DEI work. It should be just as much as a priority for every faculty member to educate themselves and make themselves more self-aware for effective work in teaching racial justice.

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix A.

***Explore ways in which all departments, and especially History, can incorporate topics of racial justice in lessons***

Although the mandatory, semester-long course on Race in America presents many opportunities for students to engage in discussions regarding discrimination, diversity, and equity, this course should not exist in a vacuum. **In other words, the course Race in America should not act as the sole setting in which students learn about societal inequities, but rather should exist in a broader conversation in which students are able to connect themes to many other disciplines.** Diversity and Inclusion work is ineffective if students are only thinking about it for a given amount of time; instead, the work needs to be a constant theme and conversation in students' daily lives. Each department, led by each department head in coordination with the DEI Director, must research the ways in which teachers can incorporate racial justice in lesson planning. Through this process, embodying diversity and inclusion becomes a mission for all faculty members, and the labor does not fall disproportionately on a designated DEI Director. Additionally, researching ways in which departments can incorporate topics of racial justice serves effectively as professional development, as each teacher will become more aware of how racial justice is related to their own discipline.

Perhaps most obviously, the History Department has the greatest opportunity to incorporate topics of racial justice into curricula. We recognize that, over time, the History Department has moved away from a strictly Eurocentric/Westernized history education, such as offering AP World Civilizations to sophomores. However, we ask the History Department to actively think about the ways in which they can challenge traditional textbook and historiographical narratives. It is often said that history is written by the victors, and many of the textbooks, especially in U.S. history, reflect this sentiment. Oftentimes, students fail to learn about the impact of settler colonialism and implementation of institutional white supremacy, and they are presented with a whitewashed or incomplete version of the Civil Rights Movement as well as other racial struggles. Within this framework, many voices of marginalized peoples are silenced and notably absent from the historical record. One way which the U.S. history teachers can begin to offer more diverse perspectives is by incorporating lesson plans crafted by the Choices Program.<sup>7</sup> The Choices Program, in collaboration with university faculty and distinguished scholars, writes history curricula for high school students that focus on challenging traditional textbook narratives and amplifying marginalized voices previously silenced by the historical record. **In order to teach students a broader and more nuanced understanding of history, we also encourage teachers to incorporate lessons on historiography—the study of writing history—itsself and provide strategies in which students can challenge traditional narratives.** The ability to challenge traditional historical narratives directly relate to Severn School's key tenet of scholarship, as a good scholar not only must know how to learn but also to question and think critically about material.

While seemingly less apparent, every other department still has the opportunity to incorporate themes of racial justice into lessons. For example, the English Department has the

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<sup>7</sup> See [choices.edu](https://www.choices.edu)

opportunity to include more diverse authors in each class curriculum. We acknowledge that the English Department has already made enormous strides in including diverse books and literature. One way to further explore incorporating themes of racial justice is to examine whether literature advances a single story of collective trauma, and how the curriculum can be improved to highlight tales of resilience and cultural community. In contrast, the STEM Departments can examine the ways in which systemic racism has impacted their fields: math classes can teach about racist algorithms and bias in data collection; biology classes can discuss how much of our understanding of the human anatomy has resulted from the exploitation of black women's bodies, and environmental science classes can talk about environmental racism and anti-blackness in the outdoors. Additionally, language classes have the opportunity to discuss the role that language plays in conquest and colonization, and the impact of the French, Spanish, and Roman empires on indigenous communities. **In short, an interdisciplinary approach to teaching topics of racial justice is essential in showing how racial inequality permeates all aspects of society.**

***Increase transparency regarding Severn School's endowment and make statistics about diversity publicly available***

In an email titled "I Missed the Moment," which Severn School faculty, staff, families and alumni received on June 12th, Head of School Mr. Doug Lagarde articulated, "As we look into our shared future, we commit to full transparency on actions and decisions related to fighting racism and injustice."<sup>8</sup> One aspect of how Severn School works towards its verbalized goal of "fighting racism and injustice" is showing how the school's endowment funds are raised and used; **in other words, how the school uses its financial resources reveals its priorities.**

Currently, there is a lack of transparency regarding Severn School's endowment. There is no publicly available information about how endowment funds are raised, nor is there information about how endowment funds are used. In order to "commit to full transparency," Severn School needs to make its financial actions more transparent so that members of the community can accurately assess how the school prioritizes its values with money. **We envision a system in which the Severn School Board of Trustees releases a financial statement to the broader community that describes the ways in which endowment funds were spent by category.** By creating a financial statement broken down by category, the community can clearly see the ways in which the Board has attempted to pursue racial justice and equity at Severn School, such as investing in affordable transportation for students to commute. Additionally, **the Office of Development should add a unique and separate fundraising category for Diversity and Inclusion initiatives to which alumni and parents can actively contribute.**

Similarly, statistics about the diversity of Severn School's staff and student body are not available to the public. Quantitative data about the diversity of the student body reveals both strengths and weaknesses in the school's mission of becoming an inclusive community where

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<sup>8</sup> Doug Lagarde, "I Missed the Moment," June 12th, 2020.



each student is known and valued. It is important to make this data publicly available on its website so that both outsiders and members of the school community can assess the school's progress in creating a more diverse student body.

### **Final Considerations:**

The suggestions outlined in this policy memo should act as a **starting point** in Severn School's effort to better support students of color and implement an anti-racist curriculum with diverse perspectives. Furthermore, we also expect that implementing such a curriculum will not serve a hegemonic purpose. To be frank, Severn's strive towards pursuing an anti-racist curriculum should not be cited in any way that excuses or denies many of the systemic problems that Severn and other independent schools perpetuate. To do so would be to entirely miss the point of establishing such a curriculum. **Rather, we envision the school beginning this process in a way that is not self-congratulatory and instead constantly examines and challenges the ways in which Severn must do better.**

In this vein, **we also recommend that Severn School establish a task force led by a DEI Director that consists of faculty members, parents, current students, and administrators.** The task force should meet regularly and discuss issues regarding diversity, inclusion, and equity at Severn School, and they should think creatively about how they can best educate and bring awareness to the broader community through action. **Moreover, in an effort towards pursuing racial justice, the Board of Trustees should also consider the ways in which Severn School divests from harmful corporations.**<sup>9</sup>

Of course, Severn School should also increase efforts to craft a more racially and socioeconomically diverse student body by recruiting students from predominantly non-white neighborhoods and offering financial aid as well as accessible transportation. It goes without saying that the quality of learning and classroom discussion improves drastically when diverse voices and perspectives are included. Yet, at the same time, **it is fundamentally irresponsible to place students of color into a setting which does not have the necessary systems in place to offer them adequate support.** In sum, a failure to address topics of racial justice at Severn School does a disservice for all members of the community

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<sup>9</sup> See "Severn School Divests" in Appendix C.

## **Appendix A: Current Student Testimonials**

*The following passages are experiences of current students of color at Severn School.*

“One time in history class, a group of monkeys appeared on the screen and the person next to me said that that was me and my family. Various times, people have also said the n-word around me.”

“The incident with [name redacted] who went to Severn last year and is coming back this coming school year was one that made me pretty upset. None of it was the school’s fault but some of the people in our community. It really messed with some of the people in my grade and created a little bit of a “side vs side” thing because people that are friends with him and friends with me, wanted to defend his actions even though they knew he was wrong and didn’t know what to do. He basically was saying nigger to his friends all over social media and calling me nigger when I wasn’t there because some stuff happened between me and a girl that he used to talk to. I didn’t even know who he was and hadn’t talked to him before things got heated. I kind of went after him at a party but he wasn’t trying to fight or mess with me in person. by the time he shadowed, everybody already knew what happened and just wanted to see an altercation. I walked up to him during A period and called him my bitch and then kept talking about him throughout the day. I threw my jacket at his face and during lunch people were saying things to him about what he did and the things he said. Eventually the school stopped things the next day and everything is ok now. It made me really upset not just because of the things he said but because when i was right in front of him he wasn’t gonna say the same things he could say when I’m not there. If I could go back and change anything I would probably swing on him and start a fight because that’s the way I feel like that should’ve gone. Even now I’m still pissed at some of the kids in my grade that wanted him to have a good time and told me to leave him alone, knowing what he did. The school should make the community have a more “together” feeling because in the whole second half of the year I hated coming to school because I knew it was going to be me and the black kids and then the white kids.”

“When I was in sixth grade I told one of my teachers (white female) that my grandmother went to the University of Pennsylvania, and she tried to correct me and say Penn State. Trying to degrade my grandmother's education, and trying to make me look like I didn’t know what I was talking about. I'm not sure if that is race related, or her just being naive and ignorant. That's literally the only real controversial thing that has happened in my time at Severn. I have also heard kids make jokes, but I'm not sure if that's relevant because I can’t remember them exactly, and they make jokes everywhere.”

“Severn has always been a comfortable place for me due to the fact that I always hang with the people I'm close with. There has been a few instances of things that have happened indirectly such as the incident in the basement when someone wrote “nigger” for the amusement

of his friends but for me I didn't know how to feel about that, I don't know how I feel about any of this stuff going on. When people say things offensive to me or my friends I don't know how to act and I know that's not right but I don't know how to control my feelings about the matter, I've always been a minority and I've learned that i'll always be oppressed regardless of how I change myself for the better, and I've become accustomed to the disrespectful remarks and such to the point it doesn't matter me anymore, I've learned to just accept these things and move on with my life. Now for Severn, as I said I personally haven't experienced anything to make me regret going there, but the same can't be said for a couple of friends of mine. I have had a few instances where people not of my ethnicity use racial slurs but again I can't do anything about it, so I just move on as if nothing happened."

"No one has ever said any racial slurs to my face, and as a female black student who is very outspoken and not afraid to speak my mind or stand up for myself, this is expected because most people know that I will not tolerate any form of disrespect. However, my experience cannot and does not define every black student's experience at Severn and I have proof of this. The first word I'll use to describe how Severn deals with these instances of offensive slurs and racism is minimization, most of my black friends have had to deal with being called a "nigger" or hearing the n-word at least once in the time that they have spent at Severn. And it doesn't just stop at this, in one of my friend's classes her and her family were even referred to as monkeys. These two examples of what is just the surface of the racial slurs and offensive comments that are said at Severn should be and is angering to many a part of black community at Severn. It is so hard when your numbered 5 students out of 100 in your grade as a black student with most of that 95 being non-POC students that are either ignorant and completely oblivious to their implicit bias and display casual racism or just see it as okay to be blatantly racist knowing that there will be no accountability for their actions. The reality is that the experience of a black student at Severn is not met with the same respect and nurture as the white students experience and I know this because of the lack of or zero-accountability that is held to students who use hate-speech or blatantly disrespect students of color. An event and decision made by Severn to accept an incoming freshman student this coming academic year who has displayed blatant racism and used hate speech such as calling a student who currently attended Severn as a freshman this year "a cotton picking nigger", had to be one of the most disappointing displays of Severn's tolerance of blatant racism. The fact that this student was even considered to be accepted into the Severn community after his actions were brought to Severn's attention really does not give me any sense of security as a black student at Severn, and I think that Severn needs to revisit their decision to accept this student into our community. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge one of my own experiences at Severn this year as a sophomore. One day I walked into my math class after lunch and after walking and seeing a black man standing at the board ready to teach my class as a shadow teacher I could feel my face light up with a smile. The teacher began to teach our class and asked us all of our names but upon landing on me, the only black student in the classroom and having an uncommon name, he asked me how I pronounced my name so he could say it

correctly. And then he repeated it back to me to make sure that he was saying it right. At the end of the class he left us with a positive message telling us to conquer our day and be the best that we could be. That night I went home after school and couldn't stop thinking about how good that class made me feel, and how good that teacher was, and the reason why I felt that way was because he looked like me. He was a teacher that taught class just like the other teachers and in some ways even better, and most importantly - he looked like me. That meant everything to me because it gave me immense hope for my future and other POCs futures at Severn. One where we would see real change in the classrooms and in the community, real representation, and real inclusivity and diversity that reflected the world around us. And that is why I emphasize that along with all of the other issues and concerns that Severn needs to address it needs to recognize that by diversifying the classroom with faculty members of all colors will send a real intentional message of Severn's efforts of anti-racism and diversification.”

Hello Mr.Soden,

I just wanted to know how the assembly went this morning regarding the \*murders\* of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd? This is the first time I have read an email from severn taking on such a difficult topic to discuss being that It's very much controversial. Some of my thoughts during this time was most importantly, “I wonder if severn will speak up and say they are an ally to the African American community and of course their African American students. My years at Severn were like walking on eggshells because in my opinion none of the teachers were brave enough to start the hard conversations of the constant oppression this world still holds toward black and brown people. I will never forget my freshman year during unity day when in my assigned group (unsurprisingly being the only black person) a student asked to go to one side of the room if you believe all lives matter and another side of the room is you believe black lives matter. There were only 2 people on black lives matter including myself. I was a scared freshman in the room with upper class men and was forced to build up the courage to stand for my people and as the conversation escalated, my assigned teacher felt the need to leave the room because she couldn't handle the dispute. My anger was at an all time high, I was mad at my classmates and most importantly myself for choosing to be apart of a so called “community” that doesn't realize how all lives matter is a protest to black lives matter when they surely see in the news unarmed black men losing their life due to police brutality. As if it couldn't be any of their black classmates that they play basketball with and share jokes with. When I left school that day, my parents were heartbroken for me and blamed themselves for letting me attend. After that day I was so set on transferring but that incident made me such a strong African American woman and I appreciate everything Severn has given me and I want to encourage anyone to attend such a prestigious school but in a time like this prestigious isn't enough. Severn needs to start ensuring the community that they are allies of the black lives matter movement just as much as they support LGBTQ. I am aware that an email was sent out to parents about the matter which lightly addressed the horrible murders of 2 innocent black men but, giving a guide for parents to talk to their children about dealing with racism is just a little too late for me. Racism is instilled from a

very young age and is taught from parents. There needs to be a more direct talk about what is going on in the world, why, and which side Severn stands on. Teachers never really witness what students of color go through in class and on social media and it breaks my heart every day when I hear stories about underclassmen scared to speak up in class when they are being bullied and it makes me even more angry when teachers avoid it as if it's not a problem. I understand that there is an opportunity for students to talk about it with Mrs. Straub, but honestly from a student, there are still a lot of young minded people who think talking to a guidance counselor is not cool. Writing this email I am filled with emotions so please don't think i'm being too aggressive because that isn't my intention at all. I just think Severn has a lot of reflecting to do and there needs to be change for the future.

"In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." - MLK

## Appendix B: Relevant Research and Literature

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## Appendix C: Severn School Divests

In an email titled “I Missed the Moment,” sent to Severn School faculty, staff, families and alumni on June 12th, Head of School Mr. Doug Lagarde articulated, “As we look into our shared future, we commit to full transparency on actions and decisions related to fighting racism and injustice.” We commend Lagarde’s commitment to transparency and urge the school to extend this openness to decisions regarding the investment of the school’s endowment, recently valued at over \$11 million.<sup>10</sup> One aspect of how Severn School can work towards its stated goal of “fighting racism and injustice” is aligning the school’s investments with its professed values; in other words, a commitment to racial justice requires material divestment from industries and companies that cause harm to Black communities and communities of color.

Severn School benefits from significant financial resources accumulated over its more than century of existence. The school has the obligation to, at a minimum, ensure that these resources do not underwrite exploitative and oppressive industries. Blueprints for divestment of this type abound. As a starting point, we urge Severn School to divest its endowment from:

1. The Prison-Industrial Complex (PIC): The PIC is defined by scholar and activist Rachel Herzing as the “the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to what are, in actuality, economic, social, and political ‘problems’”<sup>11</sup> It is well-documented that the many facets of the PIC—policing, state violence, and incarceration being three of the most visible in this moment—disproportionately harm Black people and people of color.<sup>12</sup> A commitment to fighting racism and injustice first entails a commitment to stop benefitting from racism and injustice, and that starts with divestment from the PIC.<sup>13</sup>
2. Fossil Fuels and Super Polluters: Poor and minority communities are disproportionately burdened by the environmental and health risks of extractive and polluting industries.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Severn School, “Endowment: Sustaining our Future,” accessed June 18, 2019, <https://www.severnschool.com/support/endowment?siteId=841>.

<sup>11</sup> Rachel Herzing, quoted in Mariame Kaba, “What is the PIC?” Prison Culture (October 12, 2010), accessed June 18, 2019, <http://www.usprisonculture.com/blog/what-is-the-pic/>.

<sup>12</sup> A compilation of resources explaining the PIC, mass incarceration, the criminalization of Blackness, and much, much more is available at: Micah Herskind, “Resource Guide: Prisons, Policing, and Punishment,” (updated June 2020), accessed June 18, 2020, <https://medium.com/@micahherskind/resource-guide-prisons-policing-and-punishment-effb5e0f6620>.

<sup>13</sup> A list of companies involved in the PIC and detailed methods for understanding endowment investments in these is offered by the Harvard Prison Divestment Campaign: “Of the 1% Disclosed, \$3 Million of Harvard’s Endowment is Invested in the Prison-Industrial Complex,” Harvard Prison Divestment (April 25, 2019), accessed June 18, 2020, <https://harvardprisondivest.org/one-percent-disclosed-three-million-invested-in-prisons/>.

<sup>14</sup> Melissa Andreychek, “UMD Study Shows Vulnerable Populations Disproportionately Burdened by ‘Super Polluters,’” UMD Right Now (January 28, 2016), accessed June 18, 2020,

This includes the damages wrought by climate change, which once again, hit Black communities and communities of color hardest.<sup>15</sup> Fossil Free Funds' list of 200 companies with the largest carbon reserves is a good place to start.

These suggestions are just that: suggestions. Undoubtedly there are many more companies and industries that could, and should, be added to this list. We look forward to learning about what steps Severn School will take to live up to its commitments to transparency and racial justice by divesting from arm and ensuring that its substantial resources do not perpetuate injustice and oppression. For instance, the school might commit to (1) greater transparency about its investments and (2) creating ethical investment standards (EIS) that must be satisfied by any company in which Severn School invests its endowment or other funds.

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<https://umdrighnow.umd.edu/news/umd-study-shows-vulnerable-populations-disproportionately-burdened-super-polluters>.

<sup>15</sup> Kristoffer Tighe, "COVID-19 and Climate Change Threats Compound in Minority Communities," *Scientific American* (April 20, 2020), accessed June 18, 2020, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/covid-19-and-climate-change-threats-compound-in-minority-communities/>.