Dear Students, Families, Alumnae/i, and Friends,

Kim and I wanted to reach out as we all grapple with the murder of George Floyd by a police officer last week, who is now fired and charged with third-degree murder. Floyd’s death is only the latest in a recent series of needless and preventable deaths of Black people, including others such as Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, and now, just yesterday, David McAtee.

Many people have been and are continuing to protest across the country in hopes that some real change will slow and eventually eliminate this warrantless violence against Black people, as well as the failed and racist systems that allow such violence to continue, often unpunished. Members of our community are hurting both from these recent events and also from the fact that they represent a pattern of systemic violence that tragically has changed little from generation to generation. Although technology and social media have made it easier to capture evidence and therefore collectively acknowledge this violence in recent years, it has always been present.

I am sorry that as head of school, I have not reached out to the broader White Mountain and St. Mary’s-in-the-Mountains community sooner. Both Kim and I want you to know that we want to offer support as we each struggle with our personal circumstances as they intersect with the ongoing crises of disease and racism.

In all difficult situations, we often look to our mission and the School’s connection to The Episcopal Church for guidance. In his recent Pentecost sermon on May 31, The Rt. Rev. A. Robert Hirschfeld, bishop of The Episcopal Church of New Hampshire and president of White Mountain’s Board of Trustees, echoed ideas that are foundational to the School’s Essential Skills and Habits. Bishop Rob offered that we can demonstrate meaningful curiosity by asking questions about others’ lives, particularly those who have been needlessly killed, learning more about them and who they were and might have been, and honoring their humanity.

Authentic engagement, that does more than pay lip-service to these tragedies, begins with educating ourselves and then taking action. At an individual level, the size or extent of the action is less important than the fact that we engage and try to make a difference. For the School, however, more extensive action is warranted as we seek to be a place where our Black and other students of color can feel safe, heard, and valued. It is not the responsibility of Black people or other people of color to educate white people or to make engagement easier for us. For those of us with the privilege of potentially tuning out news that isn’t pleasant, it’s our responsibility to educate ourselves and then turn that knowledge into action. One place to start is this collection of anti-racism resources put together by The Episcopal Church. Internally at the School, we are engaging in conversations about action, and we want to be thoughtful and thorough. We want our action to have an enduring and meaningful impact, which takes strategic planning. In the short-term, we will be offering time and space for current students to grieve, process, and discuss these killings and the broader issues surrounding them with their peers in Affinity Groups. We hope to have more to share about our longer-term efforts toward the end of the summer leading into the fall semester.

Supporting each other when things are good—when our discomfort might only be that the weather isn’t what we’d prefer—is easy. Finding the courage and compassion to offer real support when we are all faced with multiple challenges is a stern test. We believe that our community can meet that challenge together.

Again, you can expect to hear back from us toward the end of the summer about how we will continue to take concrete steps to make The White Mountain School a more equitable and inclusive educational community. In the meantime, please don’t hesitate to reach out to Kim or me.

Sincerely,

John and Kim

John A. Drew
Head of School

Kim Cooper
Interim Director of Equity and Inclusion