

(continued letter from Dr. Flocco)

In addition to this logistical and technical planning, the faculty has been busy -- busier and more engaged than any summer I have ever seen. Their preparation falls into several categories. They are actively reflecting on the close of our last semester (what worked? what needed work?). They are developing new technological capacities to ensure that hybrid learning will be seamless. They are thinking deeply about how to build and sustain relationships with students, regardless of what the classroom or advisor group looks like. They are re-envisioning pedagogy, practice, and curriculum. And they are laser focused on what it will mean, and look like, to become anti-racist educators. I will now turn to some highlights of the latter. I want to thank Steve Valentine, Maria Shepard, and Jill Maza who contributed portions of the rest of this letter to me in recent days and helped me to curate the content.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism Work

In [a recent article](#) for GettingSmart.com, a media channel that provides a place for educational leaders to share innovations in learning and build a community driven by equity and access, Dr. Martín Casis offered up a potent challenge to school leaders invested in the work of diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism. The opening of the article is worth quoting in full because of its eerie precision.

So you are the school leader.

You wrote a heartfelt, authentic, and timely letter to your staff/stakeholders condemning racism and publicly supporting Black Lives Matter. Your letter included a list of resources, books, videos, blogs, and links that outline how to talk about race, and how to become an anti-racist. You even attended a Black Lives Matter protest and posted it on social media.

It's true that school leaders at MKA have done many of those things, in that order. But Dr. Casis is not being critical when he writes this list. He is acknowledging work that has been done; and, slightly tongue-in-cheek, he is also acknowledging that statements are not enough. He ends his opening thought with a transition to an important and highly relevant set of questions.

Now what? Where do you go from here? Where do you begin? What is next?

Now What? Leadership

Some of what is next at the Upper School will be defined and advanced by MKA faculty members who are stepping into new leadership positions.

- We look forward to the leadership of Ms. Leslie-Ann Murray (new US Diversity and Inclusion coordinator), Dr. Lily Cui (new SDLC coordinator), Dr. Petra Sauer (new Science Department Chair), and Mr. Liam Campbell (new English Department Chair). Their individual and collective answers to Dr. Casis' questions will certainly add energy and purpose to the Upper School program and curriculum. In the words of Mr. Campbell, in an email to his department, "Remote/hybrid learning may be an immediate challenge of the coming semester, but the last few weeks has made it quite clear that an equitable and inclusive school culture is our greatest mission in the immediate and long-term future. . . . [We] have the opportunity to help fundamentally shift what education and community look like at MKA."

Where do we go from here? Partnership

Some of what is next will be defined and advanced by nascent partnerships focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- Since the beginning of June, students have partnered with Upper School administrators and faculty members to shape our program, teacher development, and the future of our classrooms. First, such partnerships led to the development of summer assignments for all students, grades 9 - 12. Next, students offered perspective and advocacy to our summer Professional Development offerings. Last, and with the most potential impact, students have begun to envision a formal working group that will liaise with the administration, in a systematic and ongoing way, to promote equity and anti-racism in the Upper School's curriculum and pedagogy.

Where do we begin? Engagement

Some of what is next will be defined and advanced by the engagement of the faculty, which has been considerable this summer. These highlights show teachers already making progress on some of the priority recommendations for curriculum put forth from the Black Student Experience Taskforce.

- The U.S. History teachers have enrolled in [Gilder Lehrman's Race and Rights](#) course led by Professor Lucas Morel. Through this course, our teachers will deepen their understanding of leading Black thinkers in American political thought and engage in a critical assessment of the tension that exists between

our country's promise of freedom and equality and the struggle of Black Americans to exercise their rights as citizens. In addition to virtually attending seminar sessions, analyzing primary source readings, and attending live Q&A sessions and expert teaching sessions, our teachers will meet regularly over the summer to incorporate conceptual understanding, rich content, authentic materials, and pedagogical approaches into their lessons.

- For years, the Global Experiences course has been focused on providing all 9th grade students with the tools to become engaged, informed global citizens. Design Thinking has served as the vehicle both for the course structure and the toolkit and roadmap of habits and mindsets by which students learn to move from awareness to action. As students move throughout the process, embedded lessons on concepts like “the danger of a single story,” render it a vehicle to practice problem solving in a way that always begins with active empathy.

This summer the team is evolving this course even further — they will build on the concept of rooting in empathy and focus much more fully on purpose learning. This will allow them to teach the course much more directly through an anti-racist lens. To do so, they will pivot to a course “story” that moves from initial work on establishing a sense of who we are as a community and then asks students to consider who they are as individuals, what’s important to them, what biases might inform who they are in relation to others, and finally, how they might leverage this new awareness. Each of these themes lend easily to prompts where students and their teachers will consider the role of race and identity. It is our hope to craft a course where students will enter the Upper School with an immediate opportunity to think more deeply about their relationship to the community, their own identity and identify where they derive purpose in their lives and apply it to the habits and mindsets we hope they’ll internalize as “the way we do school” as they move through their Upper School experience.

What is next? Students in Community

And some of what is next will be defined and advanced by the students themselves.

- Please encourage your children to take seriously [the summer assignment prepared by their Student Government leaders](#). Join them in a reading or a viewing if you can. Come September, we expect that they will be ready to work and grow, not only as history students or science students or athletes or actors,

but as members of MKA's community and citizens of a country heading into what will inevitably be a contentious election season.

So, our work in this area is robust and we have a strong foundation from which to build. While I am looking forward to the rest and relaxation associated with the last month of summer, I am keenly aware of the work that has to be done in preparation for the unique and challenging school year that awaits.

All the best to you and your families,

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