



Office of the President

“I long, as does every human being, to be at home wherever I find myself.”
- Maya Angelou

January 13, 2021

Dear Pine Crest School Community,

Some Pine Crest students will spend as many as 2,820 days, or one third, of their lives here, and it is common to see students, teachers, instructors, and coaches arriving on campus before dawn and leaving after sunset. For many of us, Pine Crest serves as an extension of home; others might say it *is* home. Collectively, we speak more than a dozen different languages, including Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, Creole, French, German, Hindi, Hungarian, Macedonian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Urdu, and Vietnamese. And we hold passports from all over the world. Our School’s *diversity*—of cultures, backgrounds, talents, experiences, and opinions—is one of our greatest assets, and every one of us *belongs* here. In all that we do, it is imperative that we honor our diversity and take steps to facilitate and perpetuate a culture of belonging at Pine Crest.

For students, feeling seen, heard, and included at school frees their minds to think and communicate openly and unleashes the possibilities for them to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. For teachers, working alongside colleagues and students from different backgrounds inspires pedagogical creativity and innovation, and for administrators and staff, having a broad range of experiences at the table helps inform good decision making for the organization. These are only a few of the countless benefits that embracing diversity brings to an institution, and providing our entire community with a safe space to learn, work, and grow alongside individuals with diverse backgrounds is one of the many gifts of a Pine Crest education.

It is against this backdrop that we are writing to you today—to stress the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging at Pine Crest and to reaffirm our commitment to continuously improving in these areas, growing and changing as necessary to meet the needs of *all* community members. With these goals in mind, we have taken the following key steps to further advance our existing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives:

- Led by Board Chair Michele Stocker '83, the Board of Trustees recently formed an Ad Hoc Committee of the Board on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to support the administration in providing all students, faculty, and staff with the opportunity to learn and grow in an environment in which they feel safe and valued, and in equipping our students, faculty, and staff with the tools they need to build cultural competence, listening, and conversation skills. In addition, the Committee is focused on ensuring that the composition of the Board of Trustees itself and its Ambassador Council reflects the School's diversity, equity, and inclusion principles.
- One of the first tasks of the Committee was to work on revising our School mission statement and merging it with our diversity statement. With input from administrators and members of the community, we are pleased to unveil Pine Crest's new mission statement:

“To develop the character, independence, and leadership of each student; to prepare our students to meet the global challenges of our future by offering an exceptional academic experience complemented by excellence in arts and athletics; and to build a collaborative, inclusive, and open-minded learning community that respects, appreciates, and encourages those with diverse cultures, backgrounds, talents, experiences, and opinions.”

Until now, our mission and diversity statements have existed separately. We believe that combining these two statements better conveys to the School community (existing and extended, past and future) our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Doing so also underscores that this commitment is *integral* to our mission, as our ability to build character and competencies in children and prepare them to meet the challenges of the future is inextricably tied to the existence of an inclusive community in which people are seen, respected, heard, and valued.

- To coordinate our schoolwide efforts, Ms. Uche Pendergast has assumed the position of Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Ms. Pendergast has been a member of the Pine Crest community for more than 20 years as an employee and a parent. Her drive, emotional intelligence, and deep understanding of the Pine Crest community will serve her well in this role. In a few short months, Ms. Pendergast has already implemented

restorative practices training to dozens of faculty and staff; worked with our Black Students Association in implementing a peer mentoring program; and created a schedule for celebrating an array of cultural heritages. In this new capacity, Ms. Pendergast will work closely with Dr. Markham and a core committee, consisting of Mr. David Clark (Boca Raton Head of School), Dr. Whitney Walters-Sachs '92 (Vice President of School & Legal Affairs), Dr. Amy Varo-Haub (Fort Lauderdale Head of Middle School and Director of Innovation & Entrepreneurship), and Ms. Sashah Ramirez (Boca Raton Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Liaison and First Grade Teacher II), to lead these schoolwide initiatives. The Board of Trustees is committed to supporting this team.

Just as we aim to develop lifelong learners in our students, we know that our study of and work in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion will never be “done.” We will remain focused on fostering respectful engagement, open dialogue, and thoughtful programming.

Together and with your support, we will cultivate an environment of belonging and a generation of culturally competent leaders—one student, one conversation, and one day at a time.

Sincerely,

Dana Markham, Ed.D. '18H
President

Michele Stocker, Esq. '83
Chair, Board of Trustees