



# ACTION PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

OCTOBER 2021





## Dear Members of the Deerfield Community,

Earlier this year, I wrote to you with an update on the efforts of the Academy to continue to strengthen community life and inclusion at Deerfield. That communication, and a timeline of action steps (included below) in support of our efforts dating back to August of 2020, highlight the school's priorities, commitments, and progress. I write to you now with a further update.

### **Our goals are simple and longstanding:**

1. to sustain and deepen a climate where all Deerfield students can thrive and flourish in a community of respect and care for others;
2. to intentionally support a learning culture that honors the disparate beliefs of a diverse and dynamic student body drawn from across the United States and around the globe. This includes a commitment to free and open expression, including ideas and opinions that some may consider disagreeable, unwelcome or unpopular.

The work of building an inclusive community that encourages diversity of opinion and perspective is never complete. This is exciting work that requires the sustained and collective effort of all members of our community: leadership, faculty, staff, students, parents, and alumni. Our efforts will continue to draw inspiration from Deerfield's historic strengths, from the energy of students and teachers, and from continued dialogue with you.

## A New Model to Support Inclusion:

Inclusion—creating a culture that affirms each student and supports their growth and future aspirations—is the lens through which we have evaluated all aspects of the Academy’s academic and student life programs, and our inclusion efforts are too important to our mission and core values to be relegated to the work of a single office. To that end, we have adopted a team-based model, one in which leadership and accountability are collaborative, embedded throughout the school, and distributed across key areas of the student experience. We have made a number of new appointments in support of this approach: in the recruitment and development of faculty, in student and community life, in Admission, in Counseling, and in the development of Institutional Research.

- **Associate Dean of Faculty Abe Wehmiller** will support all aspects of our approach to faculty hiring, development, and appraisal.
- **Director of Inclusion and Community Life Steven Lee** will support and guide students and will lead community inclusion efforts, working closely with our student Alliances, our residential faculty, and students’ advisors.
- **Assistant Director of Multicultural Recruitment and Admission Issalin “Issa” Lopez** will work with Associate Dean of Admission Jeff Armes and assist with outreach and recruitment.
- **Counselor Jessica Pierre-Chery** has joined our counseling team in the Chen Center. She brings a background in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, culturally-informed student support and care, and an interest in the spiritual lives of young people. With the addition of Jessica, there are now four full-time counselors in the Chen Center.

This team collaborates closely with Assistant Head of School for Academic Affairs and Strategy Dr. Ivory Hills, Assistant Head of School for Student Life Amie Creagh, and me. Biographies of our new faculty may be [found here](#).

## Research-focused Improvement:

We stand firm in our belief that great schools build on existing strengths and develop strategies specific to their mission and culture. They also study their efforts and hold themselves accountable by tracking and reviewing progress. We are committed to being what Derek Bok, former president of Harvard University, called a “learning organization”—one that studies impact and performance through focused research and uses that research to build on strengths, identify new areas of attention, and reach toward improvement.

We are focusing our internal research on a number of important outcomes and five key elements of the student experience: sense of belonging, student attitudes towards difference, feelings of self-efficacy, engaged learning, and openness to diverse perspectives and viewpoints. Each of these elements, research tells us, is critically important to a young person's well-being and to building an intellectual climate that supports active learning.

To that end, we have appointed Kelsey Naughton as our first director of Institutional Research. Working closely with departments throughout the Academy, Kelsey will track and study each of these key areas of student well-being through targeted community surveys—including regular “pulse” surveys and an annual climate survey in the spring—in order to build a comprehensive “dashboard of student flourishing.” That dashboard will be piloted this year and reported on regularly to the Board of Trustees, informing decision-making and resource allocation. Kelsey will also help us collect and review internal data on student health and wellness; enrollment and recruitment; student achievement; and other areas of school life.

## Student Citizenship:

Last fall, I empaneled a Discipline Review Task Force, led by Assistant Head of School for Student Life Amie Creagh and including broad representation from faculty, students, and members of the Board of Trustees, to conduct a comprehensive review of our handbooks, policies, and disciplinary practices. That process was informed by concerns, feedback, and proposals initiated by students and alumni, by the Academy’s longstanding commitment to the highest standards of conduct and accountability, and by our belief in the promise of all Deerfield students.

As I recently said to students at School Meeting, Deerfield is first and finally a place of learning. It is impossible to live a life unblemished from mistake, and it is unrealistic and unhealthy to expect young people to do so as they mature into thoughtful, caring, community-minded adults. In Mr. Boyden’s day—and throughout our history—this has found expression in a defining belief in the promise of young people to learn from mistakes and through them grow in maturity and confidence.

I am happy to report the following updates to our handbooks (including our student handbook: [Rules and Expectations for Deerfield Students](#)), our policies, and our practices:

- We have reviewed and restated our commitment to a school culture that supports and affirms all students and that is free from discrimination and expressions of intolerance and hatred.
- We have built a more proactive and intentional approach to how we orient and welcome students to campus, especially our younger students and students new to the Academy, so that they fully understand and act in the spirit of our values, particularly in the areas of respect and concern for others, expression and speech, and use of social media. To that end, we have partnered with the [Social Institute](#) to provide sustained and proactive education regarding the use of social media to all Deerfield students.

- We affirmed our commitment to being a “two-strike” school—a school that recognizes student misconduct as a sometimes necessary part of learning—even as we reserve the right to dismiss a student from the Academy on a first offense.
- Informed by feedback and input from students and alumni, we have instituted a more robust follow-up with students following a violation of our school’s values, including a flexible, sustained, and supportive restorative approach to learning. This process will encourage student reflection, growth, and accountability.
- Already this fall, all students have participated in *Rules and Expectations* sessions, led by the Student Life Office and designed to ensure familiarity with our rules, including those against discrimination and other forms of mistreatment.
- We have committed to promptly and clearly communicating with students following violations of our school values in an effort to better educate the entire community. These communications will provide transparency and clarity, while also respecting the confidentiality of our disciplinary process and the privacy and dignity of students.
- We have reviewed and finalized a new policy regarding college notification of disciplinary incidents. In developing this policy, we have studied the approaches of peer schools; consulted closely with colleges, parents and guardians; and conducted our own independent research. The Academy will no longer report disciplinary records (other than dismissal) to colleges/universities unless doing so is necessary for application. We believe that this will allow our faculty to work constructively with students and families in ways that more fully support growth and learning.

## Teaching, Learning, and Viewpoint Diversity

We embrace openness of expression as a defining element of the Academy’s intellectual and academic culture, even as we teach students to be conscientious of speech. We recognize the difference between forms of speech that advance inquiry and actions that are hateful, harassing, bullying, and illegal. In relation to this, we have taken the following steps:

- We have finalized a statement on “Conscientious Speech and Expression” as an important part of our Rules and Expectations (see page 9, section 1.8) and as a framework for future student education. This statement, founded on the idea in the words of our Vision Statement for Inclusion that “diverse perspectives fuel creative thinking,” affirms our academic commitment to viewpoint diversity, while also encouraging thoughtful, conscientious expression in keeping with the needs of a diverse community.

- Planning for our inaugural Deerfield Forum is underway. The purpose of the Forum is to model scholarly and civic engagement, and, by staging conversations among scholars, professionals, and civic leaders, promote constructive dialogue and active open-mindedness—long a defining feature of Deerfield’s intellectual culture. The inaugural Deerfield Forum will take place during Spring Term and will include a panel of diverse and expert voices moderated by Trustee and alumna Libby Leist ’97. More to come on our slate of speakers.

Now midway through Fall Term, our efforts will continue to draw inspiration from Deerfield’s “strength of heart” and from our continued commitment to the ideals of citizenship, concern for others, and openness of expression and inquiry—long the hallmarks of a Deerfield education. I thank you for your support in our work. Should you have any questions or comments regarding this progress report, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at [headofschool@deerfield.edu](mailto:headofschool@deerfield.edu).

Sincerely,



John P.N. Austin  
Head of School

Please review the ACTION PLAN TIMELINE across the following pages . . .



# Timeline



## August 2020

Delivered the Action Plan to Strengthen Equity, Inclusion, and Campus Culture to our school community.

Enhanced the materials available on our Inclusion and Community Life webpage, including a copy of the Action Plan in full, recent events and opportunities, and information and resources for the community. Links to the Strategic Plan for Inclusion and Statement on Gender Inclusion, a listing of the OICL Task Force, and an extensive FAQ were included.



## October 2020

Formed the Discipline Review Task Force, consisting of students, faculty, and trustees.

Engaged Dr. Roland Davis to work closely with our student Alliances, assist our Inclusion Task Force, and advise our Discipline Review Task Force.

Assistant Head of School for Student Life Amie Creagh outlined for students the Discipline Review Task Force's charge and timeline of work at School Meeting.



## March 2021

Hired: Director of Inclusion and Community Life; Associate Dean of Faculty; Associate Director of Multicultural Recruitment.

## May 2021

Discipline Review Task Force concluded its efforts and furnished Head of School with a report and executive summary of recommended changes.



### **September 2020**

Began a review of our handbooks, policies, and practices, adding new language regarding hate speech. Launched searches for an Associate Dean of Faculty, Dean of Inclusive Teaching and Learning, Director of Institutional Research, and Assistant Director of Multicultural Recruitment.

Relaunched the Alumni Directory and Mentoring Platform.



### **November 2020**

Student Body President Chijioke Achebe '21 presented an update on the Task Force's work at School Meeting. Results of a fall Disciplinary Committee hearing were also shared with the community.

### **December 2020**

Dr. Davis began coming to campus on a weekly basis to meet with all Deerfield student Alliances, including the Deerfield Black Student Alliance and student focus groups.

### **January 2021**

Faculty engaged in workshops with Experiential Learning Educator Jackie Broussard.



### **July 2021**

Incorporation of Conscientious Speech and Expression guidelines into the student handbook (*Rules and Expectations*); ground work laid for a data-informed “Dashboard of Student Thriving.”

### **August 2021**

Videos, by students for students, describing community values and *Rules and Expectations* shared with the community.

### **September 2021**

Student Life Office conducts *Rules and Expectations* orientation sessions as part of Opening Days/Orientation Schedule.