

To The Administrative Council and Board of Trustees,

The past few weeks have been trying for all members of the ECFS community. First, everyone was shaken by the offensive and disturbing videos in which certain members of the senior class targeted students of color not only as a body, but also individually, with a series of racial epithets. However, in the aftermath of the initial shock and hurt caused by the actions of these young men, the Fieldston community, and particularly the students of color, have been further distressed by the school's mishandling of the situation.

When on Monday, February 25th a school-wide assembly was called, it was expected by all that the decision of the disciplinary committee would be made public, and that the students most closely affected by the reprehensible actions of their classmates would see that justice had been served. We all expected, and hoped, that the institution which calls itself ethical would live up to its name. Instead, we were met with a hollow and hypocritical media statement that demonstrated more concern for the offenders than for the offended. We were met with vague assertions about consequences and confidentiality that left many of us sad and bewildered. The response of the administration has failed to uphold our school's mission, and the administration's stated vision for what Fieldston is and can be. Anger and confusion has grown as students struggle to understand why the school is betraying its ethics and failing to stand up for them.

Their trauma is exacerbated by the institution's absolute lack of transparency and unprecedented deference to a few families with power, privilege, and unlimited access to attorneys. Students have long been sharing stories of their daily struggles with members of the administration and little to no action has been taken to protect and support them. And although we have received yet another opaque and unclear communication about discipline and restorative justice, the students see no measurable sign of such a process.

We, as faculty, resolutely stand in solidarity with the students of color, and their white allies, who demand and deserve answers and change from the institution. Their voices must be heard and their experiences must be taken into account. We have been listening to their stories of repeated abuse, and we have witnessed them crying and comforting one another; we now add our voices to theirs in insisting that the Ethical Culture Fieldston School hold itself accountable to the students who feel that they must sacrifice their emotional and mental well-being to receive this education.

We, as faculty, support student demands and further commit to doing our part to see that meaningful change is implemented here at Fieldston. We acknowledge that the curriculum and the classroom matter in making Fieldston a safe and just place for students of color, and we are committed to diversifying the course of study. We are committed to holding students, our colleagues, and ourselves accountable for fighting white supremacy inside and outside of the classroom. We are committed to doing the work necessary to join students in this struggle.

In the words of our students, “stop waiting for another incident.” The administration must create immediate and ongoing opportunities for meaningful dialogue between students, faculty, families, and the powers that be. Then action must be taken in response to these conversations. The structural changes outlined by the students must be implemented not only for the community to move forward from this incident, but also to better prepare the school to effectively address these crises should they arise again; but most importantly, to make Fieldston the place that it should be.

This letter has been signed by ___ teachers, administrators, and staff. However, due to the school’s history of retaliation against outspoken members of the community, the signatures have been withheld for fear of retribution. The expectation is that there will be formal guarantee in the very near future that those who vocalize their support for students (in line with the school’s core values, and to ensure the best outcome for the kids), and their colleagues, will not be targeted personally and professionally.

We also expect an opportunity for honest dialogue, before the close of the academic year, about these and other critical issues facing the Fieldston community. This meeting should serve as the basis for continuing conversation. As stated by Board Chair, Caryn Seidman-Becker, at the ASMC meeting on March 8th, we are all working on behalf of great outcomes for children and are leading with our hearts and minds to make sure that the mission, vision, and values of the school are carried forth.

In Solidarity with #StudentsofColorMatter,

Concerned Faculty,
Signatures Withheld