CALLING ALL SPENCE COMMUNITY MEMBERS (AND FRIENDS)!!!
PLEASE SIGN THROUGH THIS FORM

Dear Spence Administration,

Two weeks ago, the administration sent an email out to the Spence community addressing the recent murder of George Floyd and nationwide protests against police brutality and systemic racism. While it was appreciated, the letter lacked a crucial component: nowhere in the letter was the racism addressed as being specifically anti-Black, nor was there any mention of “students of color.” Instead, they provided some resources—mostly to white parents—on self-education against racism. But frankly, these resources are not enough. Many of these articles talked about discussing race with children, but we’ve had these conversations before; now, we need to commit ourselves to taking action and standing up against anti-Black racism. In response to the statement, several students and alumni gathered to share their own personal experiences of racism and other forms of discrimination during their time at Spence. From this conversation, we had outlined tangible action steps that the school could take in working towards racial equity and ensuring the continued safety and support of Black students and other students of color.

In response, the Board Chair and Head of School have committed to forming an Anti-Racism Task Force that includes members of the administration, alumni, faculty, and the student body. The establishment of a task force, however, is not enough and makes no formal commitment to doing anything our initial letters have proposed. Students and faculty at Spence are well-versed in the art of creating a task force; in fact, some of them have served on them in the past and have yet to see results. We can no longer tolerate such passivity and neglect from the administration. We should not have to wait until November for a list of clear and concrete initiatives. This work requires urgency and needs to be happening right now. Thus, we are calling on the administration to commit to most, if not all of the provided demands to create a safe environment for all students while also fostering growth and critical reflection for the whole community. This work serves to benefit not just students of color, but the entire community and even the school’s reputation. Spence must commit to these short and long term solutions to be on the right side of history.

As a reminder, students are urging the following actions to be taken:

I. Declare an unequivocal condemnation of police violence and the institutions that underlie racism in our country to the entire Spence community. This means explicitly denouncing the racist comments made by our president and his enablers.

   A. Incorporate an informational section on the Spence website detailing specific efforts the school is taking to support members of color in the community and show solidarity in light of recent events. One crucial action would be posting donation links and encouraging community members to actively distribute and use their wealth and resources as a substantial form of aid.

II. Release a list of resources for self-education including but not limited to: a list of informative links, movies, podcasts, books by Black authors, organizations, and other resources that will assist in navigating conversations with family, friends, and peers.

   A. List here: Resources for Self Education

III. Facilitate frequent conversations involving students, alums, faculty, administrators, and staff to encourage dialogue about social reform and share ideas about possible strategies.
A. Assign a Book-in-Common or a film during Gathering for the start of Black History Month, and host conversations surrounding the book or film as a way to move the responsibility of these conversations off the shoulders of Black students.

B. These conversations should not only take place in separated racial affinity groups, but also in grade meetings, sports teams, extracurricular activities, etc., that are inherently uncomfortable in order for there to be any change. Separating students makes for less productive conversations, as really confronting these issues must be done together.

IV. Continue the installation of student and faculty made projects over the wallpaper in the seventh floor lecture hall, which displays and glorifies the trans-Atlantic slave trade and abuse of Indigenous peoples.
   A. This includes events that celebrate BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) cultures hosted by students and faculty.

V. Redesign and unify the Global and US History curriculums, ensuring that every student receives an intersectional education, incorporating Black history in the diaspora and the evolution of US racism and imperialism.
   A. Require the history department to rearrange the syllabi to weave Black history within existing units, underscoring the prominence of blackness in various time periods.

VI. Create specific and transparent hiring goals to curate a faculty that accurately represents the demographics of the city the school is in.

VII. Take steps to alleviate the particular burden on Black faculty and address the high turnover rate Spence has experienced with these professionals.

VIII. Introduce a yearly report on strides in social justice education and the effects of the requests herein.

IX. Implement an anonymous feedback system for each class so students feel comfortable reporting an incident without jeopardizing their relationship with the faculty member.
   A. Suggested to be added in LMS, the website used by students for class resources. A student submits a form which is presented to the teacher anonymously.
   B. For accountability purposes, the teacher must report back in LMS once they believe the incident has been properly addressed
   C. After an incident has been marked as “addressed” by a teacher, a follow-up email can be sent back to the student to ensure full protection and accountability for the student

X. Acknowledge the shortcomings of Spence when it comes to a diverse curriculum and protecting its students of color from experiencing racism within the Red Doors. We cannot stay in the past; but in order to move forward we must acknowledge the mistakes made, and the costs associated with those mistakes to the Spence community of color.
   A. This includes acknowledging the burden placed on the brave faculty who have risked their jobs to stand up for us, and to advocate for us both publicly and behind closed doors. They deserve recognition for being our support system, on top of dealing with biases apparent within the faculty.
   B. This includes acknowledging the racism present against the staff by members of the student body and faculty. These include, but are not limited to, the people who work in our kitchen staff, maintenance staff and the security team.

We look upon our time at Spence with the critical eye reserved for places we deeply care for. We hope you will commit to these actions to preserve the safety of Black community members and mobilize tomorrow’s leaders to sustain the momentum of the present.

If we hope for a substantial paradigm shift towards an anti-racist environment, then initiative needs to be started from the administration themselves. It is Spence’s responsibility to not only support its
students of color, but ensure that their voices be heard. We hope this letter inspires proactive efforts from the Spence administration towards achieving a community rooted in empathy, kindness and humanity.

As a testament to our strong, dedicated community, we have gathered signatures from students, alumni, faculty and staff, parents, and students/alumni from other New York City high schools who stand with us in our call to hold Spence accountable for anti-racist initiatives and make the school a more equitable institution for the entire community.

In solidarity,

Signed by over 1,000 as of June 16, 2020