



DOCK
MENNONITE ACADEMY

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TO GRADE EIGHT**
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Dear Dock Community,

This past school year, concerns were raised about an administrator who was working at Dock Mennonite Academy. At that time, the Board and leadership team placed that individual on a leave of absence and launched an internal investigation by an experienced consulting firm that specializes in these types of issues. The Board also retained a law firm with expertise in Title IX to review the results of the investigation and determine next steps.

In keeping with our commitment to share important information with our community, this letter summarizes findings while preserving confidentiality and identifies systematic steps that will occur institution-wide – at the Board, faculty, and staff levels, as well as involving our students and families. We are as forthright as possible, but some matters relating to student and personnel concerns cannot be shared due to privacy laws and policy concerns.

Findings

We begin by noting that, in addition to the independent investigation conducted at the request of Dock, governmental agencies also investigated this matter. Law enforcement and the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office concluded that there was no evidence of criminal misconduct. Also, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services concluded that allegations of abuse and exploitation reported to it were determined to be "unfounded." Dock's independent investigation confirmed these findings. However, Dock's priority does not stop with those determinations: our mission is to provide a Christ-centered learning environment of excellence that goes beyond the expectations found in our laws.

The investigation found that four former male students reported experiencing unwelcome behaviors and contacts from the former administrator. The Board found them to be credible. During the time the students attended Dock, the concerns they had, which were confirmed by the investigation, were not presented to Dock leadership. In the spring of 2019, other specific student concerns were brought to Dock leadership's attention and an investigation occurred. Following the investigation, Dock leadership did not notify the involved parties of the action it took to address the concerns; as a result, there was an appearance that nothing had been done, which is not accurate. No student concerns have been reported about interactions occurring after the spring of 2019.

It should also be noted that the investigation found many students who did not find the administrator's behaviors to be objectionable, and who instead reported him to be a positive influence. Nonetheless, we are committed to helping our students feel safe and to ensure that professional boundaries are maintained for everyone.



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Dock's Values

Dock is a community of faith. When one in our body hurts, we all hurt. While brokenness is a part of our journey, we pray for shalom. Micah 6:8 reads, "And what does the Lord require of you? To do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God."

Out of this faith, Dock cares deeply about the well-being and safety of every student. We are dedicated to providing a learning environment free from unwelcome conduct between any two persons in the Dock community, whether students or adults. As a result, we are saddened that any former Dock student felt uncomfortable or unheard. Each of our Board members and leadership team members is also a parent of current or former students, an alumnus, a donor or a volunteer. We bring these perspectives to our roles in the Dock community. Like many of you, we have felt sadness, anger, disappointment, and pain through this experience. We apologize to any student or parent who has felt uncomfortable or unheard.

We strive for a healthy and welcoming school climate. We want students to feel heard and to know that we take their concerns seriously, addressing them in a manner consistent with the policies and values of our school.

From the investigation, there is evidence that a group of students felt uncomfortable due to the behaviors of our former administrator. These same students felt their concerns were not adequately addressed or heard. This is unacceptable to us. Therefore, we are preparing and prioritizing a series of steps forward.

Action Steps

We are committed to taking immediate action and engaging in longer term systemic change. With the help of external advisors, we will ensure that our Title IX policy is compliant and published. We will also ensure adequate policies that define boundaries for staff interactions with students. We will make sure the Dock faculty and staff are aware of their reporting obligations under state law and our internal policies. We will periodically review our policies and when necessary, update or improve them.

We are scheduling trainings for the Board, administration, faculty, and staff. We will inform and engage our Dock students regarding our policies and complaint procedures. We will also notify parents and guardians of these policies and procedures. Our administrative, faculty, and staff trainings will include a focus on investigating and documenting concerns reported. We are committed to consistently following our policies when concerns are raised.

The Board of Trustees will ensure these tasks are completed. Adhering to these policies will continue to be a priority of the Board into the future. We ask our community to support these efforts as we work to support our mission and values. Our partnership with parents and community members is important. If you have concerns or questions around behaviors occurring with one of our students or staff members, we ask that you share that information with Dock administration. You may hear things that we do not, so we welcome your feedback and support. Educational processes are made stronger through the mutual sharing of information.

The Board has given careful and considered thought as to what level of contact, if any, the former administrator should have with our school community. While the administrator retired as he previously planned and is no



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longer employed by Dock, the Board and the former administrator have jointly decided that he would have no further contact with the students who raised the concerns and would also refrain from attending any of Dock's public events. Changes from this arrangement will be considered by the Board in the future if appropriate. We believe this is important for the new leadership team and for healing to take place.

Conclusion

For some, our actions may seem late or inadequate. In response, we apologize and reiterate that as we are guided by the facts that have been reported, we commit ourselves as Dock's leadership to the highest standards we can reach. We again acknowledge that our investigation confirmed that no actions were identified as criminal misconduct or violative of the code enforced by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. We commit, however, to excel beyond those measurements to do our best for our students, our staff, and community in the future.

Thank you for your patience, continued support, and prayers for Dock Mennonite Academy.

Sincerely,

Mr. James Gunden, Board Chair, On Behalf of the Board of Trustees

Dr. Conrad Swartzentruber, Superintendent