



BROOKLYN FRIENDS SCHOOL

Dear BFS Community,

We would like to welcome you to a Zoom forum on **Wednesday, October 21, from 7:00 to 8:30pm** that will give us all the opportunity to connect and discuss the recent situation with the Union as well as share our goals for continuing to come together as a community now and into the future. We look forward to:

- Sharing why the Board of Trustees and BFS Leadership made the decision to file the petition
- Going into further detail on what ultimately led to us reaching unity on withdrawing the petition
- Creating clarity and awareness within our community so we have a common and truthful understanding as we move forward to build a better BFS

Please see below a letter from the Board of Trustees to our community which offers more perspective, context, and important information to serve as a reference before our forum.

We look forward to connecting with all of you Wednesday. **The link will be shared next week.** Enjoy your weekend.

Crissy and the BFS Board of Trustees

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Dear BFS Community,

We are pleased that children and colleagues are back at school. We have all seen the joy on the faces of students and teachers as they engage in the sacred purpose of BFS – teaching and learning. We thank colleagues for their dedication to and care for their students, and we thank families for their patience during the recent unsettled times. In service to students, families, and colleagues, we are committed to sustaining stability even as we resolve complex issues that are essential to the immediate and long-term health of BFS.

We recognize the need across our community for healing and reconciliation, and we

are developing specific steps to nurture that process. We will share our plans as they take shape, but know that we will commit whatever time and resources are necessary to keep our Mission at the center of BFS.

We know that powerful emotions have swirled in our community, but we insist that ad hominem attacks on Crissy Cáceres or any other members of the BFS community cease. We ask that the few who have engaged in such disrespectful, hurtful, and dehumanizing behavior put that aside. In this moment, all of us must strive to evince respect, kindness, and civility in our relations with each member of our school. Restoring strained connections and unity must be our brightest guiding light, and we need to see the Light in each other. Each of us can take these steps towards healing.

We are writing now in anticipation of our Forum on Wednesday, October 21, and in order to help establish a context for our discussions. We also want to address directly, questions that have arisen in the BFS community.

Communications

We know that questions remain about our communications, decisions related to the petition, and the rapid unfolding of events between October 2 and 7 when we agreed to withdraw the petition to avert a Colleague strike. We wish to address those matters, not to resurrect past grievances or to disparage the Colleagues' choice to organize as a union, which we have accepted, but to create clarity and awareness within our community so we have a common and truthful understanding as we move forward to build a better BFS. In an Appendix that follows this letter, and because many of you have asked, we also offer our shared guiding vision for BFS and a description of Board practices.

We have heard your voices about our communications and understand that, to date, we may have erred in being overly cautious in not taking a more personal approach to speaking with you. In trying to be reflective and thoughtful in our written responses to your concerns, we have perhaps fallen short in connecting to your hearts and minds, which we regret, and we intend to change course.

Filing the Unit Clarification Petition

We want to be clear about our decision to file the Unit Clarification Petition when we did. Earlier this summer, the UAW filed an Unfair Labor Practice charge against the School with the NLRB. The charge made a false allegation against the School based on factual assertions that were entirely untrue. As a matter of fact, we refuted the misrepresentations in the charge, and as a matter of law, and integrity, we questioned the UAW's presence and influence at BFS. We were disturbed that the UAW would lie in such a way. We believe that we should affiliate with organizations that abide by Quaker testimonies. Because the filing of a false charge showed a lack of

integrity on the part of the UAW, we made the difficult decision to pursue the UC Petition after lengthy discernment.

Strike Vote

In a Quaker school, we also question the integrity of the union threatening a strike based on a vote in which 70 colleagues out of 190 in the bargaining unit either chose not to vote for or voted against authorizing the strike. We believe that we need to find a way to hear those voices and those of parents and friends with different points of view if we truly seek unity through Quaker Business practice, which does not rely on ballots, and we are committed to finding that way. We ask you to join us in this search.

Negotiations Between BFS and the UAW from October 2-7, 2020

On Friday, October 2, BFS counsel reached out to counsel for the UAW to explore a possible agreement that would include withdrawal of the petition and cancelling the strike. Crissy, her leadership team, and the Board were on 24/7 calls for the next five days so that we could make sure we were in collaboration and had unity on our direction. The Board held four lengthy meetings during this time. Over the weekend and into Monday, the School and the UAW exchanged multiple proposals that involved BFS withdrawing the petition, the Union ending the strike, and the School and the UAW clarifying their working relationship. The proposals included introducing mediation and/or arbitration and allowing leadership and colleagues to have open communications. The urgency of these negotiations prompted us to close school Monday and Tuesday, and then Wednesday. As it became clear to BFS that the agreement being considered likely would not be legally enforceable, we pivoted on Tuesday and offered to agree to a two-year Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) between BFS and the Colleagues' Union. (Negotiations in good faith had been occurring since the Fall of 2019.) Under our proposal, we would withdraw the petition, the strike would not occur, and we would recognize the union as the Colleague's legal bargaining representative. We would also resolve all outstanding issues concerning the makeup of the bargaining unit. We were hopeful and enthusiastic about the prospect of BFS and the Union moving forward with stability and predictability in their relationship and without any outstanding adversarial issues on the table.

The UAW initially responded favorably to our proposal, and we had high hopes for resolving the dispute in a mutually-agreeable manner as we continued discussions. Unfortunately, late Wednesday afternoon, the UAW abruptly withdrew from the negotiations, asserted the parties were too far apart on fundamental issues, reverted to its insistence on a one-year CBA, and signaled its intent to move forward with its plans to strike on Thursday. Nonetheless, in an effort to prevent the breakdown in negotiations and move forward with trust and stability, we offered to make significant further concessions in order to bring the UAW back to the negotiating table. The UAW refused.

We were saddened and shocked, because we made legitimately good faith efforts to reach an agreement, end the tumult, and rejoin colleagues and students. We reject the UAW's statement that the CBA proposals under consideration contained "poison pills." We were seeking an agreement that would serve our entire community. But, we did have clarity on two points. First, what we thought were good faith negotiations were not. Second, we had to halt the weaponization of children, our students, in a hurtful process in which we recognize and apologize for our complicity. We had to return care for children and colleagues to the center of our community, so Crissy and the Board decided to withdraw the petition to avert the strike and open school.

Next Steps

We will continue to negotiate in good faith to reach a CBA that will serve each member of our community. We will insist on integrity and compromise in the negotiations. We will seek to have all voices respected and heard. We will pursue a way for open communications to occur between colleagues and leadership. We will ensure that our students, colleagues, families, and Mission are at the center of our caring Quaker community. We will ensure that we remain trustworthy, responsible stewards of BFS now and for the future. And we will seek to repair the fractured relationship with the larger Quaker community, including Brooklyn Monthly Meeting, so that they can support our shared aspirations for BFS in a fair and balanced way.

In closing, we want to share the words of Robert Lawrence Smith, the long-time School Head of Sidwell Friends and the author of "A Quaker Book of Wisdom." He wrote the book for his family, especially his grandchildren, and he stated: "*One of the paradoxes of running a Quaker school is that the expression of individual conviction lies at the heart of Quakerism, and yet the good of the school cannot be sacrificed to any one individual's convictions, no matter how strongly held.*" We will strive to govern for the good of BFS, and, as we think of our current students and colleagues, we will also think of their children and grandchildren and the school that will best serve them. We hope you will join us in reaching for unity about the present and future BFS and nurturing the Light of each person in our community.

In Peace,

Crissy Cáceres, Head of School and the Brooklyn Friends School Board of Trustees

Appendix

Our Shared Vision for the Future of Brooklyn Friends School and

Board of Trustee Practices

We want to speak to the strategic vision that guides Crissy and the Board in our work together. Allow us to begin with the Head of School Search that led us to joyous unity in November 2017 in inviting Crissy Cáceres to lead us. In the Opportunity Statement (provide link), which was created from surveys, listening sessions, and individual conversations across all of our school constituencies – students, colleagues, school leadership, alumnae/i, parents, and friends of the school - we identified the opportunities and challenges for BFS as well as the leadership qualities we sought in our next Head of School. These ideas mirrored those that emerged in our Strategic Planning process that was similarly inclusive and iterative.

To summarize briefly, the opportunities and challenges included but were not limited to:

- Enhancements to the educational program through strategic resource allocation.
- Collaborative decision-making between colleagues and school leaders around program, mission, and community culture.
- Addressing the community fissures around equity, belonging, and inclusion.
- Strengthening marketing, advancement, stewardship, and fund-raising to ensure the long-term sustainability of BFS and provide the resources for strategic objectives and current operations, especially the support of colleagues.
- Improving communications and responsiveness to enhance community.
- Attract and retain the best colleagues through intentional policies and practices.
- Deepening the expression of our Mission.

The leadership qualities included, but were not limited to:

- A commitment to spirituality and Quaker education.
- An inspirational, motivating leader who will build community around a shared, compelling vision.
- Experience and skill in working with equity and inclusion.
- Exceptional listening and communication skills, including the ability to be clear, direct, authentic, and open to the ideas of others.
- Excellent administrative and managerial skills, including the ability to hire equitably, mentor and evaluate effectively, and enforce standards of accountability.
- An individual of compassion, kindness, sensitivity, gratitude, patience, empathy, humility, decisiveness, and high integrity.

We deeply respect how Quaker practice informed the uplifting of these ideas about

leadership and our community, and we feel a responsibility as Trustees to honor our shared vision. By nurturing the Mission, planning strategically, acting as fiduciaries, and hiring and supporting the Head of School, we seek to establish the conditions for this vision of leadership and community to come alive. We adhere to Quaker Meeting for Business practice in making decisions and look to the unity of our vision for guidance. We sit deeply with difficult decisions and ensure that we are fully informed. The diversity of our Board brings multiple perspectives, probing questions, and unvarnished honesty to our deliberations. We know that you are as invested as we are in the present and future of BFS. We ask that you consider the uniqueness of where we sit and believe that we serve, not out of any self-interest, but for students, colleagues, and parents now and 153 years from now. We remain steadfast in moving the school forward by enlivening the aspirations expressed by the community, and we will always seek to do this together. We are also steadfast in our support of Crissy and her leadership in moving us forward. She is the same person we hired with the attributes we sought and the ability to create a community centered on care and our shared vision.

Recent events show how fragile and fleeting the unity we had just a short time ago can be, but we remain dedicated to restoring unity and following the shared vision we have for a better BFS.

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