

September 28, 2020

Dear Crissy and BFS Trustees:

With a strike date set for October 5, we see the conflict within the school escalating to a crisis point. It may be possible for the school to weather a strike in terms of finances and operations. However, there may be irrecoverable damage to relationships within the school community, to relationships between the school and the Quaker community, and to the school's reputation. We fear that the school's essential character – its Quaker culture – will be sacrificed if you do not act immediately to resolve the conflict with the union and avoid a strike.

**Students will suffer the most.** Yes, you can put temporary teachers in classrooms, but the core of the learning experience at BFS has always been the trusting relationship between teachers and their students. The start of a school year, before students have had a chance to settle into a comforting routine – and during the pandemic, when everything is disrupted – is the worst time to interrupt the developing relationships within our classrooms.

**Colleagues will suffer too.** Your workers are heartbroken by the efforts to forcibly remove their union. They feel vulnerable and unprotected at a time when everyone is living with an almost unbearable level of uncertainty. Those colleagues who have served BFS for many years, whose dedication and love for the school are the very heart and soul of our institution – they deserve better. Some will leave; others will remain, but with shattered faith in their administration. The impact on the school will be tragic and immeasurable.

**Families will suffer.** You are receiving communications about this so we need not reiterate. However, please be very mindful of the fact that families attracted to the Quaker culture of BFS, who are becoming disillusioned by the school's position on the union and are leaving the school, will leave a void that will reverberate for years -- to the detriment of our school's foundational culture and identity.

**The school's relationship with the Quaker community will suffer.** Prior to the school's separate incorporation from the NYQM, the relationship between the school and its Quaker meetings was not good. The incorporation process took seven long years of intensive work, in large part because we needed to repair damaged relationships. You have been the beneficiaries of this work that was done by members of the school and Quaker communities who came before you. The Quakers in NYC are now questioning the fundamental values that are driving the administration's position against the union. For now, they are trusting that our work with you, centered around our proposal, will resolve the conflict. If that effort fails, we can expect outcry from the Quaker community stemming from deep concern that the school has lost its way.

**The administration and board will suffer.** Not only will you need to continue dealing with an escalating crisis, you will, at some point, be faced with the daunting challenge of restoring broken relationships. We imagine you are discouraged and exhausted now. How will you be able to focus on the school's educational mission while your energy is being sapped by this conflict? How will you find the resources within yourselves and the institution to rebuild?

**The school's ongoing progress toward equity and inclusiveness will suffer.** We recognize that threads of race and class run through this conflict in complicated ways. The struggle between the union and school leadership has surfaced issues that require thoughtful, compassionate resolution. The eroding

trust among all parties will make the necessary conversations even more difficult and will create a setback of any progress made so far.

**The school's reputation will suffer.** A primary responsibility of the stewards of any institution is to protect its reputation. The negative publicity the school has experienced so far will pale in comparison to the coverage of a strike, where colleagues will be joined by families, Quakers, and other allies. As many, including the union at the American Friends Service Committee, have noted, the notion that a workers' union is antithetical to Quaker process and values is not supported by current and historical experience. Why would we want to be the Quaker school that persists in this misguided position?

**What is the end game?** Once a strike begins, how do you envision any kind of good end? With the strike, just as with the NLRB petition, you can "win" – but please think deeply about what will be lost.

**The good news.** This week represents an opportunity that is ripe for resolution and healing. Nobody wants a strike. The desire to avoid a strike increases motivation to be flexible. Can we leverage that potential for flexibility to find a better path, a path more worthy of Brooklyn Friends School?

**A way to proceed.** Over the past two weeks, we have met twice with your ad hoc committee, and have sent you a revised version of our proposal (responding to your concerns about the original proposal), as well as materials from two Quaker labor relations experts demonstrating that the kind of open and collaborative relationship you seek with the BFS colleagues can be created with a union in place. After two meetings with us, the UAW and BFS union representatives have issued a statement indicating their interest in the proposed model for union-management Partnership/Collaboration. They have stated their willingness to work together with you to create this model and cancel the strike, if the school withdraws its petition to the NLRB.

We ask now for an answer from the Board. Are you willing to endorse our proposal and take the first step of withdrawing the petition?

Nancy Black  
Alice Pope  
Benjamin Warnke