

**We Can Rise:  
A Letter to Students at an Historic Moment**

Dear Students,

Over the last eight months, your world has changed dramatically. You have been incredibly resilient through this pandemic. At the same time, you are witnessing so much unfairness and telling us that you are losing trust in some of our leaders. You are living through a moment in history that will change the future of our world, our nation, and our city.

We know that there is difficult work ahead, but we are so optimistic for your futures! As the Nobel Peace Prize winning South African Desmond Tutu said: “Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all the darkness”. Practicing hope allows us to have an open mind to possibilities for the future, and we want to do all we can to help you with this.

We want to remind you of this: hope in the face of adversity can bring about collective action. Since your education depends upon your ability to trust the adults in school, you deserve to hear from us about a few of the things in which we all believe:

We believe that schools must demonstrate that they are not partisan--not “red” schools or “blue” schools, but rather safe and brave schools where you learn to engage in reasoned, respectful debate, critical thinking, and a free exchange of ideas (even half-formed ideas), without fear of judgment.

We believe that schools must give you the skills to debate the issues in our city, country, and world; but also, to learn that there are certain issues around which there is no debate. For example, we believe it is important to reject white supremacy and bigotry, as well as violence, in all its forms. You should expect to hear this from leaders.

We believe that schools must create environments built on kindness, equity, honesty, inclusion, and respect for those whose opinions differ from your own.

We believe that schools must promote the act of voting in democratic, free, open elections and the peaceful transfer of power.

We believe that schools must support truth, facts, science, and reasoned debate.

We believe that schools must create opportunities for you to voice your values and practice courage in the face of adversity and wrongdoing.

We believe that schools should expose you to ideals that you fall in love with so much that you will not only work towards them but also cherish and protect them.

Finally, we believe that our city, our country, and our world will emerge wiser and healthier. We believe this to be true because we believe in you, and in our individual and collective ability to rise above and, no matter what the outcome of the presidential election, live our lives in a way that is aligned with our values.

Sincerely,  
Carrie Catapano, Head of School  
West End Day School