

Dear Westridge Students, Parents, and Alumnae,

At Westridge, we are committed to ongoing review of our policies, practices and procedures to ensure that we are creating a school community that supports our core values of integrity, respect, responsibility and inclusion.

In conjunction with our Board of Trustees, we have recently revised our Anti-Harassment and Bullying Policy, and now, in ways that are similar to many schools, universities, and business organizations across the country, we are considering how best to support transgender individuals and address our society's emerging understanding of gender identity. This national conversation has grown and developed over the last few years, and as a result discussions about understanding the issues surrounding this topic are found wherever equity and inclusion are valued.

As a girls' school, we enter into this conversation from a specific lens. We know that being a girls' school is part of what makes Westridge such a special place; we know that our commitment to all-girls is, in part, why we are able to inspire such intellectual adventurousness in our students. By our nature, we create spaces where students do not feel the pressure to conform to outside expectations of what a girl "can do" and we strive to meet students wherever they are as individuals. We help every girl to push the boundaries and to refuse to be defined by the expectation of others. We are committed to maintaining our unique identity, even as we commit to helping our students find theirs. Girls' schools around the country are engaged in similar conversations, and we are thankful that we have their experiences with this conversation to help inform us as we engage in this important discussion.

I invite you to read the attached document, which outlines our approach to this discussion. We will convene a school-wide task force and are seeking representation from our student, parent and alumnae constituencies. In addition, if you have experiences and thoughts that you believe will inform our efforts, or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, or Elizabeth McGregor, Head of School.

In addition to our Board of Trustees, the Executive Committee of the Westridge Parent Association, the Westridge Alumnae Board, and faculty and staff have been apprised of our efforts and have helped advise on our messaging and the work of the Task Force. We look forward to working together with our community to engage in a meaningful and respectful dialogue in support of our students and prospective students.

Kind regards,

Jemma Giddings



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Supporting Students On Their Chosen Paths

Articulating a statement of practice to support students in their own journeys with gender identity

12/7/15

The Fundamental Purpose of Westridge School is to develop in girls their intellectual and creative powers and their unique qualities as individuals. Essential in the school's purpose is the commitment to building a community that reflects and values diversity, respects individual differences, and responds to a changing and dynamic world.

As part of our commitment to uphold this Fundamental Purpose, our Core Values of Integrity, Respect, Responsibility, and Inclusion, and our commitment to creating a socially and intellectually safe community, we are now undertaking the task of articulating our practices regarding transgender students, with respect to both our admission process and to the student experience at Westridge. We have always sought to be an inclusive community that supports students in every part of their journeys to adulthood, and we are committed to ensuring that we have supportive practices that respect the individual differences of our students and provide for them an inclusive community that allows students to walk their own paths with integrity as they learn to live lives of responsibility, meaning, and impact.

Essential to this endeavor are the following assertions:

- Westridge is a school committed to educating girls.
- Westridge encourages and expects open, inclusive, and respectful dialogue.
- Westridge celebrates and supports the unique qualities of each girl as she journeys toward self-discovery.
- Westridge welcomes students and families from many different walks of life and many different perspectives.
- Westridge holds at its core the values of Integrity, Responsibility, Respect, and Inclusion.

Head of School Elizabeth McGregor provided the following comment regarding Westridge's position and practices with respect to transgender and questioning students in the October 2, 2015 issue of Spyglass, our school's student-run newspaper:

"We are a school for girls but will be as supportive as possible of anyone who is questioning or transitioning from being a girl to a boy while they are here at Westridge, or who self identifies as a girl when going through the admissions process. Whatever we do, it always has to be on a one-to-one basis; you can't write hard and fast, black and white policies about these things, you need to handle [them] very sensitively and with each individual in mind."

As part of this process, we will convene a task force comprised of representatives from Student Leadership, the Board of Trustees, Westridge Alumnae, and Westridge Faculty and Staff to discuss how we best embrace Westridge's Fundamental Purpose and create a safe and supportive environment for all Westridge students. Over the next two months, this group will meet to examine practices and policies at other institutions and organizations, particularly other girls' schools and women's colleges, and recommend a statement of best practices for admission, enrollment, and support for transgender students and students questioning their own gender identity. The Westridge Board of Trustees, in collaboration with the Head of School, will then make final decisions about position statements and practices around this topic.

As a starting point, this task force will begin with the following recommendation from the National Coalition of Girls' Schools (NCGS):

*The National Coalition of Girls' Schools (NCGS) believes the education of girls must ensure intellectual and social safety. Forging strong communities built on supportive relationships are hallmarks of all-girls schools. NCGS recognizes that when students transition – or begin to question their gender identity – they remain at the core young people with whom our schools have built trusting and safe relationships. Therefore, NCGS encourages our schools to consider, at every point, the importance of working in a supportive way with students and families on a **case-by-case basis** during enrollment processes and as students identify as transgender within their school communities.*

Our schools are also committed to creating a safe and secure environment for all students and protecting each and every student from harassment, bullying, and negative behaviors, based on a student's gender questioning or transgender identity.

From these initial assertions and statements, we will work to articulate a statement of practice with regard to admissions of transgender students, support for current students who are questioning or transitioning, and practices that support and respect the individual paths that students follow with regard to their own gender identities.

If you are a student, a member of our faculty/staff, or an alumna of Westridge and would like to be considered for participation in this task force, please do email Jemma Giddings at jgiddings@westridge.org with a cc to Cindy Martin at cmartin@westridge.org. We know that there are many people who are interested in being a part of this conversation, and we ask for your understanding as we work to balance the desire of individuals to be involved with the need to have a reasonably sized task force. The task force welcomes input from all members of the community.

We look forward to keeping our entire community informed on the progress of this task force. Please feel free to reach out to Elizabeth McGregor, Head of School, with any questions that you have.