Throughout our history, Westtown has progressively expanded our commitment to diversity, and each time, our community has been enriched. Whereas diversity originally referred only to non-Quakers, and later to African Americans, today we have a far more inclusive definition. This ongoing commitment is grounded in our Quaker belief that there is that of God in every person and is exemplified in a community that shapes students’ intellectual, ethical, and spiritual development and prepares them to be leaders and stewards in the world they will encounter beyond the Westtown campus.

Today, schools throughout our region and across the United States are facing a new landscape as they strive to create a safe and welcoming community for all students. Many educators are working to sort out matters of gender and gender identity in the pre-K -12 setting. At Westtown, we are growing in our awareness of the needs of transgender and gender-expansive students as they seek to live authentically in the world.

Over the past few years, keeping with Friends’ principles of respect, equality, and integrity, we have been steadily and sensitively responding to the expressed needs of individual students.

This spring, I convened a working group which includes the Principals, Athletic Directors, Counseling staff, other faculty members and a Board member to review our practices and develop guidelines for supporting our student population. In June, The Board of Trustees approved the proposal by this group to explicitly include gender identity in our inclusivity statement.

**Statement of Inclusivity**

Guided by the Quaker belief that there is that of God in all persons, Westtown School is a community of learners who value – and are themselves strengthened by – the rich diversity of our members. In order to prepare students for living and leading in a diverse and complex world, we welcome students, families, faculty, staff, and trustees with differences based on (but not limited to) race, color, ethnicity, religion, age, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, family structure, and economic background.
We are looking at ways to provide gender neutral facilities in the Main Building in addition to those in the Science Center and Athletic Centers. We are in dialogue with other schools and associations, including the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), the Association of Boarding Schools (TABS), and the Friends Schools League (FSL) with regard to best practices for supporting transgender students. We understand that gender identity issues arise differently in the teenage years than at younger ages, and the kinds of education and accommodations we will provide will be developmentally appropriate and different in Upper, Middle and Lower Schools.

We have already engaged our faculty and staff in professional development opportunities to learn more about transgender students with an expert from the University of Pennsylvania, and our next step is to extend our educational efforts to our larger community. We are also developing a resource list for those of you who want to develop a deeper understanding of what it means to be transgender.

Our goal, as always, is to work compassionately and collaboratively to create an environment in which all of our students feel safe and can flourish. This requires commitment, reflection, dialogue, and deliberate action based on our mission and principles. I invite you to share your thoughts and ideas with the division Principals, the Athletic Directors, Dean of Students, Counseling Psychologist Maria Alonso, or me about how we can best achieve this goal, and about what kinds of educational opportunities would be most valuable.

Westtown has always supported students in expressing their authentic self and voice within the context of a respectful community, and we are continuing to do so. This is one of the most valuable lessons and preparations we can give them. We must be open and willing to learn from our young people while providing the “guardrails” they need to navigate in the world.

August 26, 2015