May 8, 2016

Dear friends and family of Nobles,

When adults who are entrusted with the care of young people betray that trust, we react with incredulity, shock, anger and other powerful emotions. Nobles exists to nurture young people and prepare them to live healthy, engaged lives marked by meaningful contributions to the communities they inhabit. Causing harm, or tolerating harm, to a child would be the antithesis of our mission and would result in unequivocal action.

In recent months, the Boston Globe and other media have reported on cases of sexual abuse or assault of students by faculty or staff members at independent schools. We add our voice to the many educators who are troubled by these occurrences, past and present.

As incidents at other schools have recently become known, we recognize that we cannot have perfect knowledge of our own school history—and we have contemplated how Nobles might handle a similar case. The answer is simple. We would act with the integrity that we have always tried to instill in our students, motivated by profound concern for their well-being and a sense of trust in our community.

Certainly, we take steps to protect students. Nobles requires, for instance, that all school employees complete CORI (criminal offender record information) and SORI (sex offender registry information) checks prior to working with students. Our screening efforts also include extensive personal reference checks for potential hires who might work with students. Each year, we train faculty and staff on appropriate boundaries in their relationships with students and how to recognize warning signs of unsafe relationships in others. Our counseling staff is trained to identify vulnerable students and create safe avenues for all members of our community to raise concerns. The Student Life Team—which comprises counselors, nurses, learning specialists, a consulting psychologist, the dean of diversity initiatives and the dean of students—pays attention to the school’s tone and culture and attendant issues, large and small.
In addition, we educate students to recognize and react assertively should they find themselves in an uncomfortable situation. Students in Classes VI through III take Personal Development, a comprehensive, full-year course that addresses issues of personal safety and boundaries. In that course, we also introduce topics such as healthy relationships, consent, ethics and decision-making. For Classes IV through I, the school offers sexual assault awareness programming, partnering with outside organizations to help students develop the emotional tools and resources necessary to navigate difficult circumstances.

While we have implemented these safeguards, we recognize that no defense is flawless, and we are considering how we might strengthen and clarify these efforts. We hope that no Nobles student has suffered an assault by a faculty or staff member and that none ever does. Should we discover otherwise, Nobles would treat any such allegations with the utmost gravity and concern for the welfare of our students or former students. Of course, we also would meet any and all of our obligations under the law.

If you have concerns related to this issue, we want to hear from you. You can reach us at Bob_Henderson@nobles.edu (head of school), Beth.Reilly@wilmerhale.com (board president) or Mark_Spence@nobles.edu (director of counseling).

Thank you, as always, for your enduring support of our mission to inspire leadership for the public good.

Sincerely,

Robert P. Henderson, Jr. ’76
Head of School