



# STEVENS

December 17, 2019

Dear Stevenson Community:

We write to provide you with an update regarding our continuing investigation of historical employee misconduct towards students. As you will recall, in April 2017 we wrote to alumni, past faculty, current students, and their parents to share the news that Mr. Adam Hardej, who taught at Stevenson from 1985 to 1988, had been named in an investigation of educator sexual misconduct at Choate Rosemary Hall, the independent secondary school in Wallingford, CT, where he taught prior to his brief tenure at Stevenson. Though there was at that time no record of sexual misconduct by Mr. Hardej when he worked at Stevenson, the nature of his alleged behavior at Choate—which included sexual misconduct with female students—necessitated that we investigate his conduct while he taught here, in part because the avenues for reporting such behavior were less established thirty years ago than they are now. At that time, we encouraged former students who believed that they had received inappropriate attention from *any* employee during their time at Stevenson to contact the school or an investigator retained by the school's counsel, the law firm of Fenton and Keller.

In January 2019, we wrote to you to share the key findings of that investigation. [To request an additional copy of that letter, please contact Elena Mueller '89, Stevenson's director of communications.] In providing a summary of that investigation, rather than the report itself, we sought to protect the privacy of survivors, witnesses, and other innocent people who the report either named or made potentially identifiable. At that time, we also announced that we had directed Fenton and Keller to retain a second investigator in order to address matters that the first investigator had determined were beyond the scope of her investigation, and to consider any new allegations that might be received from survivors of or witnesses to misconduct following our January 2019 letter.

Before proceeding, we wish to once again directly thank everyone who has participated in this process thus far. We know that it requires great courage to come forward whether one is a survivor of, or witness to, sexual misconduct. You have helped us learn about instances in which Stevenson could have better supported students harmed by employee behavior, as well as others who were adversely affected by those experiences—especially survivors' peers and families. We are committed to learning as much as we can about our school's past, acknowledging and supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, and ensuring the safety and security of our current and future students. By stepping forward, you help us to more effectively protect others' wellbeing, and give us the opportunity to extend our deepest and most heartfelt apologies to you for every instance in which the school's response was insufficient or unsatisfactory.

## **The investigation**

Following our January 2019 letter, we received a number of phone calls and written correspondences from former employees, graduates, or past parents who described conduct that they had either experienced or heard from third parties. These reports were all referred to Ms. Stephanie Atigh, an experienced investigator, as were three instances from the 1980s that Mr. Joe Wandke, who served as Stevenson's president from 1983 to 2015, reported to the first

investigator. [As noted above, because the first investigator did not receive direct reports from survivors or witnesses regarding the instances Mr. Wandke described, she determined that they were beyond her scope. Consequently, they were referred to Ms. Atigh for further consideration.] Throughout her assignment, Ms. Atigh had full access to Stevenson’s employee files, extant records, and current personnel. Over the course of her investigation, she either met with or interviewed by telephone people who reported having directly experienced and/or who witnessed inappropriate conduct, including sexual misconduct and boundary violations.

In what follows, we share Ms. Atigh’s factual findings and conclusions. In providing a summary of her investigation, rather than the report itself, we once again seek to protect the privacy of survivors, witnesses, and other innocent people who her report either names or makes potentially identifiable. It should be acknowledged that Ms. Atigh did not provide factual findings and conclusions in response to every report she received because in some cases those reports were not based on direct experiences or misconduct that had been witnessed, but rather incidents that had been heard about from others—and standard practice precludes investigators from reaching out to potential survivors of sexual misconduct who have not yet chosen to come forward on their own. In this light, please know that when survivors or witnesses do come forward to share new or additional information about these second- and third-hand reports, we will renew these investigations and share the factual findings and conclusions we receive.

### **Naming**

Consistent with the standard practice among peer schools, we do not name survivors or witnesses who wish to keep their identities confidential, and we avoid sharing details that may serve to identify them. We also seek to take reasonable precaution to avoid the possibility of making unfair public accusations against employees and/or former employees. Therefore, our threshold for the public disclosure of past employee sexual or other behavioral misconduct is established by:

- The severity of the misconduct, its effect on the former student(s), and/or whether the school was made aware of concerns surrounding the misconduct;
- Whether there exists an ongoing current risk to students at Stevenson or elsewhere;
- Whether the allegations could be substantially corroborated; or
- Whether the employee has already been named in our school communications or in another school’s investigation report.

### **Notification**

We make every effort to notify schools who are employing or who have employed any former Stevenson employee who, following an investigation, has been found to have engaged in sexual misconduct or related behavior. Where appropriate, we make reports to the proper state and/or local agencies.

### **Analytical standard and terms**

The analytical standard that Ms. Atigh used for her findings is the preponderance of the evidence, that is, the evidence on one side outweighed the evidence on the other side.

Her investigation report employs the following terms and defines them in these ways:

- *Sustained*  
An incident is sustained if a preponderance of the evidence obtained during the investigation supports that conclusion. In other words, a finding that reads “it is more likely than not” means that there was a greater than 50% chance that the facts contained in the finding are true.

- *Not Sustained*  
There was insufficient evidence to determine that the alleged conduct occurred.
- *No finding*  
The investigator was unable to make a finding based on the available evidence.

We employ these terms in the section that follows in order to stay true to the investigation report's framework and vocabulary. Additionally, we generally employ either the word *student* or *peer* when describing events that transpired while a person was enrolled, and *graduate* when describing events that transpired subsequent to that same person's graduation.

### **Key findings**

Based on initial reports that were either forwarded to Ms. Atigh by the school or were received directly by her, the investigation report provides factual findings and conclusions in regard to the alleged misconduct of a man who was employed at the school as a coach and resident faculty member for a brief period in the mid-1960s, and the three instances that Mr. Wandke first shared during the first investigation, and then recounted again to Ms. Atigh.

#### *Unnamed instructor 1*

A mid-1960s graduate reported that an athletics coach who also served as a dormitory counselor awakened him one night in his dormitory room. The man appeared to be intoxicated. He insisted that the student come with him to his residence, where he committed sexual misconduct with force. He threatened to cut the student from the team for which he served as the coach if the student did not submit to the behavior or if he reported the behavior. The student made no reports about the incident to any adult or peer. He explained that there was no one in the administration with whom he felt he could discuss the matter, and he had no friends in whom to confide. The graduate recalls that the man left the school during the following academic year.

After interviewing the graduate, Ms. Atigh sought to locate this former employee. The school's legal counsel engaged a private investigator because the school had no contact information for him. Despite these efforts, which included interviewing surviving former colleagues, his location remains unknown. Given that the alleged misconduct took place almost sixty years ago, it is possible he is deceased.

Ms. Atigh concluded that insufficient information prevents a finding that sustains or does not sustain the graduate's allegation, but that there is no reason to doubt his credibility. Our empathy for what the graduate has experienced in the wake of that evening—including feelings of betrayal and isolation—is sincere and deep. We appreciate his decision to come forward and bravely share his experience with the investigator, and we welcome the opportunity to sincerely apologize on behalf of the school for what transpired. We have each called him directly to convey these sentiments, and to assure him of our commitment to re-open our investigation into this former employee should other survivors or witnesses come forward to provide information sufficient for a conclusive finding. In keeping with the provisions of the Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act (CANRA), we have reported the incident to the Monterey County Department of Social Services (DSS).

#### *Unnamed instructor 2*

Mr. Wandke reported that soon after he began his tenure as headmaster in 1983, he became concerned about rumors that a teacher may have engaged in sexual or behavioral misconduct with a student. The teacher took a medical leave of absence at the end of that school year, and

tendered his resignation rather than return to Stevenson from that leave. He died soon thereafter.

Ms. Atigh concluded that there is insufficient evidence to sustain the allegation that the teacher engaged in sexual misconduct. As stated above, if survivors or witnesses come forward to share new or additional information about this teacher, we will renew our investigation into this allegation and share the factual findings and conclusions we receive in due course.

*Unnamed instructor 3*

Mr. Wandke reported that in the 1980s, the parents of a female student who had just graduated reported to him an act of sexual misconduct by a teacher and his wife. The alleged misconduct, involving the reporting student and a male classmate—both of whom were day students—had occurred in the teacher’s dormitory apartment late in the evening on the day of the graduation ceremony. Mr. Wandke recalls that he met with the reporting student and her parents in his office the next morning, and that he then interviewed the teacher and his wife, who both acknowledged the essential validity of the allegations. Mr. Wandke recalls that he immediately dismissed the teacher and that both the teacher and his wife were required to leave campus that day. Mr. Wandke stated to the investigator that he never provided the teacher with a recommendation or endorsement for subsequent employment.

Ms. Atigh interviewed the former teacher twice by telephone. He flatly denied the allegation of sexual misconduct. He remembered being called at some point to Mr. Wandke’s office—alone, without his wife—to respond to an anonymous report that Mr. Wandke had received regarding the students’ presence in his apartment, at which time he claimed he explained to Mr. Wandke’s satisfaction that nothing untoward had happened among them. He further claimed that he was not fired from Stevenson; rather, he had secured a new job that spring and was therefore already planning to leave Stevenson at the end of that academic year. This last claim appears to be supported by the school’s personnel records. His now ex-wife declined to be interviewed by the investigator.

Though Mr. Wandke recalled consulting regularly with the board chair and a county district attorney on allegations of employee misconduct, both of these people are now deceased. The school does not possess any records as to whether the school or the reporting student’s parents contacted DSS, the police, or the sheriff’s department. More than thirty years later, Mr. Wandke cannot now recall the names of either the reporting student or her male classmate, and neither of these two people—now in their 50s—has yet chosen to come forward.

For these reasons, Ms. Atigh concluded that there is insufficient evidence to make a finding that the allegation is sustained or not sustained.

We should pause to note here that were an employee to receive such a report now, she or he would act in concert with colleagues, and either make a report to the DSS or ensure that such a report is made. If DSS declined to investigate, the school would arrange for an external investigation to be conducted, such that the reporting student and her male classmate could be interviewed, their parents could be notified, and the extent of the teacher’s misconduct could be properly determined.

Even in the absence of a sustained allegation, and without knowing the names of the two graduates associated with the allegation, we apologize to them for whatever may have transpired that evening—and we encourage them to come forward whenever they should choose to do so,

such that we can apologize directly and re-open our investigation into the allegation of misconduct. In keeping with the provisions of CANRA, we have reported the incident to DSS.

*Mr. Garth Gilchrist*

Mr. Wandke recalled that in March 1990, soon after Stevenson converted the former Briarcliff School into its lower and middle divisions, the parents of a middle school student invited a middle school teacher in his first year of employment at the school, Mr. Garth Gilchrist, to look after their son at their home while they went on a brief trip. During their absence, Mr. Gilchrist sexually molested the student at the family's home. The student reported the molestation to his parents, who swiftly notified the police. The teacher was arrested, convicted of lewd or lascivious acts with a child 14 or 15 years of age, and incarcerated in San Quentin State Prison, where he remained until his release in 1993. As a consequence of his conviction, he is a registered sex offender.

Ms. Atigh's investigation confirmed Mr. Wandke's recollection of this incident, which was reported upon by local media outlets at the time it happened. Mr. Gilchrist's crimes violate every expectation we have for our employees and the trust that parents invest in their children's teachers. On behalf of the school, we are deeply sorry for what the student in question experienced.

**Protection for today's students**

As noted above, and in our January 2019 letter, Stevenson has initiated a number of efforts over the past decade to ensure that our community is free from sexual and other behavioral misconduct. For example, our hiring process involves exhaustive background and reference checks. We enlist the counsel of nationally recognized experts on boundaries and conduct, provide relevant annual faculty training and student programs, and have revised our school policies, practices, and handbooks in light of the emerging standard of care. Our training for all employees is now both regular and thorough, and we maintain records to substantiate reports. Any employee who "reasonably suspects abuse or neglect" of a student is expected to make a report to DSS, the police, or the sheriff's department, or to ensure that such a report is made, and this expectation is made explicitly clear to all employees during our annual training, as are a host of related requirements associated with CANRA.

Additionally, teachers, administrators, and the school counselor regularly work together as a coordinated team to ensure that a student who reports such misconduct will be safe and supported. It is also now more likely that an outside investigator retained by the school's general counsel would look into contemporary concerns regarding sexual misconduct and make findings that would guide the school's further response. Lastly, non-supervisory employees are not permitted to provide endorsements of their colleagues or former colleagues on school letterhead, and are strongly encouraged to consult with the appropriate supervisors before responding favorably to any such requests.

Students are regularly instructed to reach out to specific administrators, as well as to other trusted adults, including their parents and/or guardians, in the event they experience any behavior that contributes to a hostile environment—whether it is verbal, non-verbal, written, electronic, physical, or psychological; whether it takes the form of harassment, misconduct, hazing of a racial, sexual, religious, class- or team-based nature; whether it occurs between or among students, or between students and employees. The student handbook includes a range of features—developed in partnership with nationally-recognized experts—that inform and guide students and their families concerned about misconduct committed by both employees and peers. Additional information about the school's measures to ensure that no student suffers

abuse while in our care, and to ensure that adults and students can enjoy and benefit mutually from appropriate relationships, can be found in our January 2019 letter.

**Conclusion**

On behalf of Stevenson and its board of trustees, we apologize once again to all former students who experienced employee sexual or other behavioral misconduct here, and to survivors' peers and families who were adversely affected by those events. Our recognition that the school could have in some cases supported you with greater effectiveness and care inspires our present vigilance on behalf of our current and future students. We will share the findings of our subsequent investigations in a timely and transparent manner, and we ask for your patience and trust as we move forward. If you have questions or concerns, please write to either of us at [president@stevensonschool.org](mailto:president@stevensonschool.org).

Sincerely,



Dr. Kevin M. Hicks '85 P '29  
President



Mr. David Colburn '76 P '11  
Chairman