



# STEVENSON

January 9, 2019

Dear Stevenson Community:

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 tenure at Stevenson. Though there was 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.

We invited people who may have experienced inappropriate conduct, including sexual misconduct and boundary violations, by Mr. Hardej—and/or by any other school employee during their time at Stevenson—to contact an outside investigator, Ms. Linda Adler, an attorney with Liebert Cassidy Whitmore LLP who was retained by the school's legal counsel, Fenton and Keller. In doing so, we were equally concerned about inappropriate conduct that may have gone previously unreported, as well as instances in which the school's response to timely reports had seemed insufficient or inadequate. Throughout her assignment, Ms. Adler had full access to Stevenson's employee files, extant records, and current personnel.

Now that we have received Ms. Adler's report, we write to share its key findings. We provide this letter, rather than the full report, for several reasons—the most important of which is to protect the privacy of those survivors named or made potentially identifiable by that document.

Before proceeding, we wish to address and 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. We are grateful to you for reaching out. Your stories 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. What you have shared will help us keep making progress in this crucial area. We are committed to learning as much as we can about our school's past, acknowledging and supporting survivors of sexual and other behavioral misconduct, and ensuring the safety and security of our current and future students. The harms done to students in the past must not recur. 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.

We cannot assume that the reports that have been investigated to date are the only possible instances of employee sexual and other behavioral misconduct toward Stevenson students, and we are prepared to receive additional reports of such misconduct, which we will investigate as we learn of them. For that reason, we have directed the school's legal counsel, Fenton and Keller, to retain Stephanie Atigh to serve as outside investigator for any additional such reports. Ms. Atigh represented municipalities and other public agencies for over 30 years. She is an experienced workplace investigator, providing investigative services to private and public

employers for over 10 years. If you are the survivor of employee sexual or other behavioral misconduct that went unaddressed when you were a student, or that was handled by the school in an insufficient or inadequate way, we encourage you to write to Ms. Atigh at [stephatigh@sbcglobal.net](mailto:stephatigh@sbcglobal.net) or by calling her 831-901-9651, a telephone number that she has reserved for this investigation.

### **The investigation**

The school received a number of phone calls and written correspondences in response to our April letter. Two of these reports were first-hand accounts in which graduates described their experiences while they were students. Several other reports were from former employees or graduates who described misconduct that they had heard about from others, including in some cases through rumors. All of these reports were referred to Ms. Adler. She did not receive any reports from or related to current Stevenson students. Additionally, she received no reports of sexual misconduct involving current Stevenson employees, and no reports of sexual misconduct of any kind by Stevenson employees over the past nine years.

Mr. Joseph Wandke, who served as Stevenson's president from 1983 to 2015, spoke to Ms. Adler about three separate instances from the 1980s in which he became aware of possible employee sexual and other behavioral misconduct, and he explained to the best of his recollection how he handled these situations as examples of his approach to reports of such misconduct. In each of the three instances he shared, the employee whose conduct was in question was promptly dismissed. There is no evidence to suggest that Stevenson provided any of these former employees with recommendations or endorsements in order to gain employment at other schools. Because Ms. Adler did not receive any direct reports from survivors or witnesses regarding the events Mr. Wandke described, they fell outside the scope of her investigation and have now been referred to Ms. Atigh for investigation. The findings from Ms. Atigh's investigation will be shared when we receive her report.

### **Naming**

Consistent with the emerging 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 decisively corroborated; or
- Whether the employee has already been named in our school communications or in another school's investigation report.

### **Notification**

We will 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 will make reports to the proper state and/or local agencies.

### **Keywords**

The 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. That is, it is more likely than not that the event happened.
- *Not Sustained*  
There was insufficient evidence to determine whether the alleged conduct occurred.

We employ these terms in the section that follows in order to stay true to the investigation report's framework and vocabulary. We 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. Adler by the school or were received directly by her, the investigation report provides factual findings and conclusions in regard to seven allegations.

Two of these allegations pertain to the conduct of the aforementioned Mr. Adam Hardej, who was employed at the school as a teacher from 1985 to 1988. Two of these allegations pertain to the conduct of Dr. Ron Hammond, who was employed at the school as a teacher from 2003 to 2009. The allegations against Mr. Hardej and Dr. Hammond and the investigation report's findings will be treated in detail below.

Of the remaining three allegations about which the investigation report provides factual findings and conclusions following extensive inquiries:

- One involved a graduate's report that in the 1980s a male teacher engaged in a long-term sexual relationship with one of that graduate's female peers while that peer was an enrolled student. Both the teacher and the peer are deceased. That allegation was not sustained. A second graduate, interviewed by the investigator at the first graduate's suggestion, stated that she believed the first graduate's allegation was inaccurate, and alleged that the teacher and peer had a lone sexual encounter at some point subsequent to her graduation. That allegation was sustained, though not decisively corroborated. We do not name either of the deceased owing to our concern to protect the deceased graduate's privacy.
- One involved a graduate's allegation that an administrator failed to respond to a sexual assault the graduate claims to have reported to that administrator during the 2004-2005 academic year, at which time the graduate was a sophomore. The assault was said to have involved two students and to have occurred in a public place. The graduate did not witness the incident. After making this claim to a school employee via text in 2017, the graduate repeatedly declined to be interviewed by Ms. Adler. That allegation was not sustained.
- One involved a former employee's allegation that in the 1980s the school failed to respond appropriately to his report about a teacher's sexual misconduct. That allegation was not sustained.

If and when survivors or witnesses come forward with new or additional information, we will renew these investigations.

*Mr. Adam Hardej*

According to the investigation report, a graduate responded to our April letter by reporting an incident that occurred between her and Mr. Hardej when she was a student. Mr. Hardej invited her to play tennis. Afterward, he took her to a restaurant for a dinner at which they both consumed alcohol. He then invited her back to his campus residence. Once there, he gave her two large albums of photographs to review in his living room while he left the room to shower. The graduate recalled that the albums contained many photographs of nude or partially clothed women, and described the albums as having the look of a private collection. Concerned by the implications of his behavior and his apparent intentions, she left before he returned to the living room.

She did not discuss this incident with anyone at the time and did not report it to the school. She explained that she would not have known how to report it, in part because Stevenson's channels for reporting such matters at the time were not clear to her. While the investigation report did not sustain a finding, owing to insufficient evidence, Ms. Adler found the graduate's recollection of the incident to be credible, and her description of Mr. Hardej's behavior—specifically, his sharing a collection of photographs of nude or partially clothed women with her—to be consistent with his behavior as it was reported in Choate's investigation report.

We apologize to this graduate, and regret deeply that the school failed to make it clear to whom she might report Mr. Hardej's misconduct and from whom she might seek support. We are relieved that she had both the presence of mind and opportunity to extricate herself from the situation his behavior created.

Additionally, a former employee reported to Ms. Adler that Mr. Hardej had made a different student feel uncomfortable during her private tutoring sessions at his on-campus residence. None of the former administrators interviewed by Ms. Adler recalled being notified by either the former employee or the student of her discomfort at the time, and the graduate named by the former employee in this report declined to be interviewed. The former employee's allegation was not sustained.

Mr. Hardej left Stevenson at the end of the 1987-1988 academic year. It is our understanding that he never sought nor gained employment as a teacher subsequent to his departure. He declined to respond to Ms. Adler's request for an interview.

*Dr. Ron Hammond*

According to the investigation report, Dr. Hammond resigned from his position at Stevenson in March 2009 after he was confronted about his conduct toward a female student in his hotel room while he was acting as a chaperone on a school-sponsored trip. The student, deeply distressed by his behavior, reported it to her personal therapist the next day. The therapist quickly reported the incident to the school. Having received this report from the therapist, the school immediately notified the student's parent and interviewed Dr. Hammond. According to the former school administrators who interviewed Dr. Hammond at that time, he did not dispute that he had violated professional boundaries, and he acknowledged that what he did was wrong and contrary to the school's expectations. He left campus within days of the school having received the therapist's report.

The graduate contacted Ms. Adler because she recalled that, soon after Dr. Hammond's departure, an administrator had advised her to avoid expanding the circle of people at the school with whom she was discussing the matter—advice that caused her to feel silenced by the

school. She also alleged that the school had failed to notify the proper authorities about Dr. Hammond's behavior toward her.

The investigation report concluded that in responding to the student's query about how best to ensure her privacy following Dr. Hammond's departure, an administrator did in fact advise her to avoid expanding the circle of people at the school with whom she was discussing the matter. Though the investigation report recognized that the administrator meant to help the student maintain the privacy she desired, the advice was stated badly and resulted in her experiencing isolation, confusion, and distrust. We deeply regret that she did not receive more effective support and caring validation, that the administrator's advice to her was badly stated, and that she was not given immediate, explicit, and repeated assurance that what happened was not her fault.

Before sharing the investigation report's finding insofar as the second allegation in this matter is concerned, it will be helpful to provide some context. The Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act (CANRA)—passed in 1980 and revised several times since then—provides definitions and procedures for mandated reporting of child abuse. Over the years, numerous amendments have expanded the definitions of child abuse and the persons required to report, known as “mandated reporters.” Mandated reporters are primarily people who, owing to their employment, have contact with children under the age of 18. A mandated reporter's obligation is triggered when she or he, in her or his “professional capacity or within the course and scope of her or his employment, has knowledge of or observes a child whom the mandated reporter knows or reasonably suspects has been the victim of child abuse or neglect” (California Penal Code section 11166). In such a circumstance, the mandated reporter must make a report to the Monterey County Department of Social Services (DSS), the police, or the sheriff's department.

The investigation report found that the school administrators employed at the time of the incident could not recall whether any reports were made to DSS, the police, or the sheriff's department by the school, the student's personal therapist, the student's parent, or a lawyer hired by the student's parent—all of whom were in communication with one another following the student's report to her therapist (who in that role was also a mandated reporter). Regrettably, the school does not possess any records as to whether it contacted DSS, the police, or the sheriff's department. Based upon the evidence Ms. Adler reviewed, however, she was unable to determine whether it was more likely than not that the school had failed to notify the authorities, so the allegation was not sustained. Regardless of this finding, we feel strongly that if the school did not make a report to DSS at the time, it should have done so.

It is important to note that the school's protocols for ensuring that such reports are made are now clear and broadly promulgated. Our training for employees is 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 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. 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. 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.

On the basis of these acknowledgements, we extend our most sincere apologies to the graduate who bravely came forward to report the school's inadequate efforts to support her in the wake of Dr. Hammond's departure. We are deeply sorry for what you experienced and for the distress that you have borne as a result.

### **Protection for today's students**

As noted above, 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, 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. We are fully committed to doing everything possible to ensure that no student suffers abuse while in our care, and that adults and students can enjoy and benefit mutually from appropriate relationships. Toward that end:

- We engage our students in ongoing discussions about self-care, consent, healthy relationships, bystander training, and good decision-making.
- We ensure that our students understand our support resources and that they know how and to whom to reach out to for help.
- We provide regular training for faculty and staff in maintaining proper boundaries with students, recognizing and addressing colleagues' improper behavior, and honoring our obligation as mandated reporters.
- Our *Code of Ethical Conduct for Employees in Relation to Students*, which all employees annually sign as a condition of employment, provides a framework for continuing professional development for all faculty and staff, and clear guidance for how to respond to concerns regarding sexual misconduct and related behaviors if and when they arise in a timely, thorough, and coordinated manner.
- We conduct background checks on all employees, non-employee faculty spouses who reside in on-campus housing, and independent contractors.
- We are committed to investigating all sexual and other behavioral misconduct allegations, and will refer any suspected case of sexual or behavioral misconduct to relevant authorities.
- We regularly review our policies and practices that pertain to conduct and mandated reporting, provide relevant training for senior leaders and other designated employees, and conduct periodic third-party audits in order to ensure that we are in compliance with the standard of care.

### **Conclusion**

On behalf of Stevenson and its board of trustees, we apologize 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 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