

# Building Diversity & Strength

In 2018, Mr. Manning unveiled the school's Diversity, Equity, and Justice Statement, written in a months-long process by a faculty committee and approved by the Board of Trustees, to affirm the school's mission to foster "a climate of *belonging*, so that each member of our Bulldog family feels secure, respected, and valued as an individual," to quote from the Statement in part. The Statement also echoes, and thereby reaffirms, the

Mr. Manning partnered with the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities to conduct annual diversity and equity training to encourage teachers to cultivate inclusive classrooms and add the voices of underrepresented groups to the curriculum. As a result, the Lower School faculty structured the social studies curriculum around the theme of "creating a just society," a key phrase in the school's *Philosophy*. Middle and Upper



*Philosophy's* focus on making students "aware of their role in creating a just society." The introduction of the DEJ Statement was both a milestone and a watershed moment, as the school had not previously added to its core institutional documents over many decades.

The DEJ statement has energized efforts to prepare faculty to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body. Under Mr. Manning's leadership and with intentional outreach by our Admissions Office, the population of students of color has increased dramatically from 5% at the beginning of his tenure to 25% now. Moreover the school continues to diversify its faculty and administrative leadership team, noting the benefits these perspectives bring to our students' experiences as well as our community as a whole.

School English and history courses have added perspectives from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and most recently, African American history. Summer faculty readings such as Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *Stony the Road* and Colson Whitehead's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Underground Railroad* have raised awareness about racial injustice. Guest speakers devoted to social justice have addressed faculty and students, most notably NFL star and motivational speaker Ben Watson; Morgan Stanley executive Derek Melvin '01; Poet Laureate of Virginia Tim Seibles, who served as NA's visiting poet; author and activist Wes Moore, now Maryland's governor; and radio talk show host and local community leader Barbara Hamm Lee.

# ening a Sense of Belonging

Mr. Manning has long been a champion of the learning that can transpire outside traditional classroom spaces; robust club and co-curricular activities celebrate the vibrant voices, cultural traditions, and history of our students. Long-established Middle and Upper School multicultural clubs continue to thrive and promote events such as Multicultural Day and Chapel talks. In addition,

Khan. The school has also partnered with Norfolk State University's choir to present annual concerts.

Mr. Manning's steadfast efforts have put Norfolk Academy in the position to be a national leader in education, committed to preparing "students to become ultimately useful and responsible citizens of a democracy — aware of their role in creating a just society." Indeed, the Board's most recent Strategic Plan,



the Upper School PRISM Club (People Respecting the Identities of Schoolmates) amplifies the voices of students identifying as LGBTQ+ and their allies, giving them an outlet to share their experiences.

In keeping with Mr. Manning's belief that access to a diversity of perspectives enriches the learning experience for all of us, students also hear from a variety of distinguished guest speakers and performers, including Newbery Award-winning author Kwame Alexander, who read excerpts from his book *The Undeclared* during All-School Seminar Day. Other visiting authors have included Chinese American graphic novelist Gene Luen Yang and award-winning Muslim author Hena

*Creating a Just Society: Integrity, Leadership, and Pluralism*, made that a major focus. More challenges lie ahead, but he has set the table for our new head of the school to continue this important work. ♦

**Jennifer Rodgers '97** serves as a Middle School English Teacher and Admissions Associate.

**LEFT TO RIGHT:** An advocate of introducing students to diverse perspectives, Mr. Manning brought in a multitude of speakers over the decades, including Virginia's Poet Laureate Tim Seibles, who spoke in 2017 and served as NA's visiting poet; author Kwame Alexander, whose book *The Undeclared* was the focus of an All-School Seminar in 2021; and NFL star and motivational speaker Ben Watson, who spoke in 2019. The diversity of Norfolk Academy's student body grew during Mr. Manning's tenure from 5% students of color to 25% today.