

THE THACHER SCHOOL

CONCLUSIONS REACHED BY THE THACHER BOARD OF TRUSTEES FROM THE INVESTIGATION

Having received the independent investigation report by Munger, Tolles & Olson, the Board of Trustees has drawn a number of initial conclusions:

- The School failed to properly protect its students and alumni—including by failing to follow up in some instances on students' concerns about or reports of sexual misconduct.
- The impact on students was profound. Many suffered lasting harm not just from the sexual misconduct itself but also from the School's handling of the misconduct. Some students were shamed, silenced, and not heard. The School did not address the false narratives that circulated among the Thacher community about the survivors of sexual misconduct, resulting in further trauma to students who needed the School's help the most.
- The School tolerated and at times fostered a culture that valued the experiences and voices of boys and men over those of girls and women and that allowed sexual misconduct to be minimized, ignored, and dismissed.

In all these ways, the School failed to live up to its values.

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The investigation covered decades of incidents of sexual misconduct. During this period, the Board and School administrators did not work together to ensure that Thacher's practices, procedures and policies were always consistent with best practices as they evolved over time.

- The Board did not fulfill its obligation to assure that the School was properly protecting the safety and well-being of students entrusted to the School's care.
- The Board failed to identify aspects of School culture that contributed to an environment in which sexual misconduct was not appropriately recognized or addressed.
- The Board failed to devote sufficient oversight and resources dedicated to the important issues of sexual misconduct awareness, detection, prevention, investigation, reporting, training, and discipline.

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- The School failed to consistently prioritize the well-being of survivors or complainants. There were instances when students reporting sexual misconduct did not receive a sympathetic response, were not offered resources or counseling support, were not believed by the administration, or were not taken sufficiently seriously. The School failed to prioritize the well-being of students when it hired individuals alleged to have engaged in sexual misconduct, failed to follow up on students' concerns about these individuals, and failed to fully confront the realities of sexual misconduct. The School failed to address rumors or narratives that cast doubt on survivors' credibility and allowed their experiences to be silenced or hidden. The School's failures further deepened survivors' trauma. The School's failures were perceived by many in the community as choosing the reputation and perception of the School and of the perpetrators over the well-being of the survivors.
- The School allowed faculty and staff who engaged in sexual misconduct with students to leave the School without appropriate communication to the community about their departure. In some instances, faculty, staff, and student perpetrators went on to other schools, and the School minimized their misconduct when communicating with those subsequent schools. When the School did take action, the lack of communication to the School community regarding the consequences for sexual misconduct fueled a belief that the School did not take sexual misconduct seriously or did not believe the survivor's account.
- The School's enforcement of the intimacy policy and other major School expectations had the unintended effect of discouraging and intimidating students from reporting sexual misconduct and prevented them from getting the help they needed.
- The School's practice of funneling all reports of sexual misconduct to one administrator, who was also responsible for other aspects of student life, including decisions about student leadership, discouraged students from reporting.
- The School tolerated and in some instances fostered an environment where students feared the social cost, shame, and also the anticipated inaction from the administration that might result from reporting misconduct by another student, faculty, or staff—especially those viewed as popular amongst students or viewed as favored by School administrators.
- Certain aspects of our school's culture—including gender bias and a failure to adequately address sexuality in general—inhibited reporting of sexual misconduct and impeded appropriate responses to reports of sexual misconduct.

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- The School in many instances more rigorously addressed student drug and alcohol violations than it did faculty and student sexual misconduct. This led many students to believe that the School did not view sexual misconduct as equally serious.
- The School failed to recognize grooming behaviors.¹ The School's policies and practices for preventing and addressing grooming behaviors were not always consistent with best practices.
- In many instances of sexual misconduct, the School failed to recognize the inherently power-imbalanced and thus potentially abusive nature of faculty-student relationships, particularly with charismatic and popular faculty members. The School was guided by an erroneous belief that adult-on-student sexual misconduct could occur only when the student was under the age of 18 and did not understand that, even after a student turns 18 or graduates from Thacher, the power imbalance continues.
- The School failed to provide adequate training on trauma-informed approaches and affirmative consent to those responsible for interviewing students reporting sexual misconduct.
- School administrators and faculty lacked a clear understanding of requirements for mandatory reporting to law enforcement and how to appropriately communicate those requirements to students. This often had the effect of silencing students, discouraging thorough reporting to School administration, and preventing students from getting the help they needed.
- The School's policies and processes for investigating and disciplining student sexual misconduct were inadequate to assure that there were safeguards in place for fairness to both complainants and respondents.
- The School failed to acknowledge the trauma suffered or to adequately address the mental health challenges faced by students who experienced sexual harassment or sexual assault. The School in some instances failed to recognize signs of students being in distress and missed opportunities to intervene and to help those students when they needed help the most.

¹ The Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) describes "grooming" as "manipulative behaviors that an abuser uses to gain access to a potential victim, coerce them to agree to the abuse, and reduce the risk of being caught." Grooming may include efforts to isolate potential victims, develop trust by sharing secrets, and desensitize potential victims to touch or discussion of sexual topics.

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- There were instances in which the School failed to respond appropriately to sexual misconduct experienced by LGBTQ+ students or to same-sex sexual misconduct. School administrators in some instances minimized or dismissed students' concerns and left students who experienced same-sex sexual misconduct feeling like they had nowhere to turn for help.
- The School failed to recognize or acknowledge the lasting and serious harm that survivors suffered as a result of sexual misconduct. This failure was reflected in the School's actions and inactions—including through, for example, awarding diplomas after expulsion or continuing to invite to School events certain individuals who were reported to have engaged in sexual misconduct. In providing redemption for perpetrators, the School did not appropriately take into account the ongoing harm suffered by survivors.

As we move forward together, the Board stands unequivocally confident in the leadership of Head of School Blossom Beatty Pidduck and the School's administration. The Board is committed to working together with the School's administration to address the failures identified here and to improve the School's prevention and handling of sexual misconduct.

Both the trusting relationship between adults and students, which is a hallmark of a Thacher education, and the close-knit nature of the Thacher student community are also, unfortunately, vulnerable to abuse. The School therefore must remain especially vigilant and resolute in its efforts to prevent and address sexual misconduct. To that end, the Board will work with the School's administration to implement corrective actions. These [corrective actions](#) fall into six main categories: (1) implementing measures to support students; (2) improving training and education; (3) revising policies and procedures for handling allegations of sexual misconduct by Thacher employees; (4) revising policies and procedures for handling allegations of sexual misconduct by Thacher students; (5) strengthening Board training and oversight; and (6) implementing additional strategies to prevent and address sexual misconduct.

The Board recognizes that meaningful change will require the steadfast and ongoing commitment of the Board and the School administration, as well as the courage to continually confront difficult realities. The Board is committed to engaging in this hard work and to ensuring fidelity to the core values of honor, fairness, kindness and truth.