

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the RVA Community, Students, Staff, and Alumni,

Many of you are aware that RVA has had a difficult year.

In August 2017, a student Instagram group containing elements of cyberbullying and sexual harassment directed at fellow students was discovered. Mistakes were made in the initial investigation, and communication regarding the incident was slow and sometimes unclear. In December, the parents of one of the harassed girls wrote an open letter to the RVA community, expressing concern and frustration with RVA's failure to protect their daughter and adequately address their concerns. Following this, RVA began to receive letters from former students and staff telling their own stories and detailing their concerns about RVA's culture and failure to protect students. Some of these letters were sent directly to us; some were posted on the alumni Facebook group. Most of the letters were thoughtfully written and clearly expressed a desire for positive change at RVA. Some were painful to read, sharing stories of bullying and other negative experiences at RVA. A general theme was concern with RVA "culture," which some of the writers considered sexist, misogynist, and outdated.

These issues are of great concern to the RVA administration, the RVA school board, and the AIM International office. In our efforts to address these concerns, and to ensure the safety of our students, we have overseen various changes at RVA. Here is a partial list:

- 1) Appointment of a full-time child safety lead at RVA
- 2) A new policy on cyber-bullying, a strengthening of the sexual harassment policy and the child safeguarding policy.
- 3) 9 staff newly trained by CSPN in child safety
- 4) Student-led initiatives against pornography use
- 5) An outside audit of child safety, completed this month; results due next month. Results of the child safety audit will be shared with the wider RVA community.
- 6) An outside review of RVA culture, to be completed in the first term of the 2018-2019 school year. Issues to be considered: sexual harassment, misogyny, racism, bullying, insularity, communication, transparency. Results of the audit will be shared with the wider RVA community.
- 7) An email address will be set up at the AIM International Office where current and former students (and staff) can share their RVA stories. Another letter about this is forthcoming.

With these and other initiatives, it is our hope and prayer that RVA can become a healthier and safer school, campus, and community. We believe that this will happen! At the same time, we are sorry to all those who have been hurt, both recently and in the distant past. In particular, we apologize to:

- 1) The students who were harassed and bullied in the original Instagram group. We are sorry that this happened in the first place, and that the initial investigation was mishandled.

- 2) The Smith family, authors of the open letter. Our communication has been slow and sometimes unclear. We acknowledge, and state publicly, that their intentions in writing the letter were for the protection of their daughter and other students, and to help RVA address negative cultural issues. We believe that they acted and wrote honestly without any intention of causing injury or division.
- 3) The RVA community, for slow and unclear communication.
- 4) Other students and staff, past and present, who have had negative experiences or been hurt at RVA. We are especially sorry about students who have been bullied, harassed, or have been the victims of misogyny, sexism, or racism, whatever the source. As noted above, we want to hear your stories. An email address will be set up for this, details to follow.

We can all affirm that RVA has much to offer in terms of academics, extra-curricular activities, discipleship, traditions, caring and godly staff, and spiritual emphasis. There is so much that is positive about RVA, and we are thankful to the Lord for our students and our staff who pour themselves into them.

We also acknowledge that there are problems at RVA; that RVA culture can and should improve, and that we can do a better job of protecting our students. What we do not know is the extent of these problems. Are they widespread or sporadic? Are there systemic cultural problems at RVA, or just a few specific issues that need to be dealt with? We hope that the recent child safety audit, the upcoming outside cultural review, and the email address will help us to better understand and deal with these questions.

We trust that the Lord is walking through these difficulties with us. We believe that in spite of our human weaknesses and sins, that He will indeed bring positive change to RVA, for the blessing of His people, the extension of His kingdom, and the glory of Jesus Christ. We humbly ask for your prayers, your patience, and your help in facing these challenges!

Mark Kinzer, RVA Superintendent
Tim Cook, RVA School Board Chair
Luke Herrin, AIM International Director