

# My Turn: Suzanne Fogarty: Believe in the power of all girls

By Suzanne Fogarty

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At Lincoln School, our students represent a variety of perspectives, though they all have one thing in common — respect for each others’ opinions, even if they are different from their own. In the Lincoln community, with its strong foundation of putting girls first for over 130 years, with our deep roots in Quaker values — equity being one of them — we carve out the space and the confidence for girls and young women to speak up and to speak out, to own their opinions and their stories. Simply put, even when dealing with complex or challenging issues, many of which are found in current events, here we both believe in each other and we believe each other.

One such opinion comes from Eliza Staples ’19: “I know all-girls schools will not single handedly change deeply ingrained notions, nor will they eradicate the issues of sexual assault, sexism or bias against women, but they are a good place to start. We can gather and discuss these issues. ... We see something that we think is unjust, that has affected us or the people we love, and not only do we want to do something about it, we know that here, we can.”

That freedom is one of the hallmarks of a Lincoln education. Recently, the director of our Middle School, Deb Hanney, shared the following quote by Caroline Caldwell at Middle School Parent Night: “In a society that profits from your self-doubt, liking yourself is a rebellious act.”

I love this quote. Not because liking oneself should be a rebellious act. But because it is a call to action for girls and young women who live in a world that seems to say being self-critical is the path to acceptance, that girls must reach deeper and speak louder just to explain themselves, and that they must grasp for a higher bar in order to gain respect. This is why we teach our students skills like public speaking, so they feel the power of Lincoln’s voices; self-defense classes, so they recognize the strength within themselves; and courses like Gender Studies and Language and Power, so they can better navigate the complex world in which we live.

When Lincoln students enter the red doors of this school, they know that their opinions matter, and that their ideas and feelings are our focus. It is a welcome respite in a society that does not always put girls first, and it is exactly why girls schools — Lincoln School — have never been more important, never been more relevant, and never been more necessary than right now.

And, as often happens here at Lincoln, our students, like Camilla Ledezma ’19, say it best:

“[In the here and now] we cannot forget about the steps that so many, from Ruth Bader Ginsburg to Tarana Burke, have taken to make the country and the world a more welcoming, empowering place for women and girls. What we learn at Lincoln means we’re taking our own steps toward that goal as the next generation of powerful women. Through our classes, our open group discussions (during which no topic is taboo), our programs outside of school, and more, we’re not just being prepared for the world; more importantly, we’re learning how to prepare the world for us—so that we can finally speak the truth and be believed.”

To all the girls out there, not just at Lincoln, but beyond: We hear you. We believe you. And together, we have hope that our tomorrow will be a brighter, bolder, and better place for all.