To the Marlboro College Board of Trustees:

The Marlboro College Alumni Council stands with the alumni and former staff of color at Democracy Prep in their questioning of DP’s founder, Seth Andrew. They have detailed hundreds of incidents of Andrew’s racism, bullying, and manipulative behavior towards people of color at Democracy Prep and his other charter schools. The words of Black N Brown at DP speak for themselves, so we have included their letter in its entirety below.

Through Democracy Builders Fund, Mr. Andrew has now entered into an agreement to purchase the Marlboro College campus, which would bring this leadership style to Vermont and the Town of Marlboro. We believe that the values he has displayed in the past are not the values of Marlboro College and its alumni.

We recognize that this is new information that is coming to light after the Campus Working Group made its recommendation and after the Board accepted DBF’s offer. Given the seriousness of the allegations being presented, however, we feel that it is entirely warranted for the Board to take the unusual step of revoking their acceptance of the offer. As leaders of the Alumni Association, we therefore strongly encourage the Marlboro College Board of Trustees to do everything in their power to cancel the agreement.

Given these grave concerns, it is important that this hard work be done to ensure that the Marlboro campus does not fall into the hands of someone whose work is antithetical to the core values of the Marlboro College community. If we can be of any assistance in this effort, please call on us. We remain committed, above all, to the common goal of honoring the legacy of Marlboro College.

Sincerely,

The Marlboro College Alumni Council

Daniel Doolittle, Randy George, Cate Marvin, Jessica Taraski, John Coakley
To the Marlboro College community and other interested parties,

We are reaching out to you, as stakeholders who care deeply about education in Vermont, Marlboro College, and its legacy. We are currently at a pivotal time in our nation’s history. The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated issues of race and class in access to employment, paid time off, and health care. The recent deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and many others have also led to renewed interest in having serious conversations around race, policing, and what allyship looks like in those fights. We have heard throughout the years, even in New York City, that Marlboro College is a place that engages in those types of conversations. It is because of that history of having courageous conversations, that we ask you to hear us today.

In late May, it was announced that Seth Andrew, through his organization Democracy Builders, finalized plans on purchasing the campus of Marlboro College to begin his own higher education program, Degrees of Freedom. Seth and Democracy Builders' goal is to “improve outcomes, especially for low-income and first generation college students.” Cited in the media, and in his own press, has been his experience with successfully building a network of high performing charter schools in the US; as well as other schools across the world. We hope, through this letter, to give you some insights into the man behind Democracy Builders, the irreparable harm he has caused to the low-income and first generation students of color that he served as the founder of Democracy Prep; and show you why the sale of the Marlboro College campus to Seth Andrew, is not only antithetical to the legacy of Marlboro, but a great human rights concern for the very demographics that he claims to serve.

We are Black N Brown at DP, a collective of African American, Afro-Latinx, and Latinx Democracy Prep Alumni (students, families, and staff) who navigated and survived the traumatic racism of Seth’s last educational venture, Democracy Prep Public Schools. In order to do our part in dismantling systemically racist systems and to give survivors of Democracy Prep the opportunity to heal from past traumas, we have begun to collect and share stories of the harm that the network has inflicted on students, alumni, staff (past and present) and families and call for substantive change in the organizations current iteration. We also feel it vitally important to ensure that these people are not able to inflict this same harm on any other community.

As you may already know, Seth Andrew founded a network of “No Excuses” charter schools called Democracy Prep Public Schools in Harlem, NY in 2006. He chose Harlem because of what he felt were a lack of high quality public school options to serve students of color. He did not bother to look at the legacy of excellence and high achievement in Harlem. He saw what he wanted to.

Many well-intentioned parents put their kids in his schools because of the promise of scholarship dollars, international trips, and the ability to attend the college of their choice. Many staff, including staff of color, joined his faculty, excited at the prospect of living out their passion for educating students well. What people were subjected to was something akin to human rights abuses. And because it was black and brown people, no one was coming to our rescue. To add insult to injury, those scholarship dollars never came, and many of the students to whom these promises were made would transfer out due to the mentally and physically unsafe, prison-like conditions that Seth Andrew subjected those students to.

He once made 12 year olds walk up and down the stairs to practice compliance so many times that a student had an asthma attack. While we can detail the stories, it would be best if you
heard directly from some of his victims. Over 200 current and former staff, students, and parents have spoken to us about their treatment by Seth, and the organization that he started. Some of their stories are below:

- “Seth Andrew also told me that I did not have what it took to graduate high school even though I demonstrated I could pass and make it to 12th grade. He also said I would not make it pass my Freshman year of college.” - Democracy Prep Alum ‘13 (and college graduate)
- “One day, My sibling was out sick, and my mother sent me to retrieve her homework. I complied and retrieved it from a room, where detention happened to be held. Seth Andrew stopped me on my way out, assumed I was a troublemaker and pressured me to join the line of students who were in detention” - Democracy Prep Alum ‘14
- “I can’t stress enough how this has been one of the most traumatic jobs I’ve ever experienced and I am so sorry for all the children that go through this prison. It’s sad because as staff of color, we go in wanting to help black and brown children and end up further oppressing them by complying with the policies and practices.” - Democracy Prep Staff Member 2017-2020
- “The first graduating class of DP High School were treated like commodities. So much so that when the Founder Seth Andrew got wind that students were unhappy with the schools attempts at holding them back DESPITE having all the credits to graduate, he instructed the counseling staff to DENY students requests for THEIR OWN academic information.” - Democracy Prep Staff Member 2011-2013

As an adult leader, Seth was cruel, calculating and abusive, especially to staff of color. He ruled his fiefdom with an iron fist, firing and blacklisting any staff who dared question or challenge his abusive student policies. He dismissed the concerns of staff who spoke out about questionable discipline practices. As Democracy Prep grew, he continued to engage in discriminatory hiring practices, filling his schools with scores of young white Teach for America teachers, with no urban education experience, and passing over experienced teachers from the community. He frequently made disparaging comments about district school teachers and leaders, as well as disparaging comments about the community in which his schools sat. He used the power of his wife's media connections to spin a story about his school that fit their narrative, and hid the horrors that everyone was dealing with inside. Again, see below for the experiences of staff, in their own words:

- “As the school year progressed, and among so many offensive and demoralizing moments at DPCS, I will never forget my shock and outrage at one particular meeting, called by Seth Andrews, that I still think about (often) a decade later. The meeting was "actually" entitled "Benevolent Paternalism" (he had a real knack for meeting titles!). The primary purpose of it seemed to be to explain to staff why students were offered violin lessons and ski trips, as opposed to other activities in which they may be more interested. At the start of the meeting, and given its explicitly racist title (literally on the agenda), I felt angry, and complicit in something despicable, based on the meeting title alone.” - Democracy Prep Staff Member 08-10
- “Funny how Seth Andrews doesn’t see the relationship between his well-known vindictiveness/track-record of persecuting those he perceives as enemies (or even just in his way) and “anonymous Instagram posts” calling him to account. Willful ignorance at its finest!” - Democracy Prep Staff Member 08-10

These submissions, by students and staff who worked directly with Seth illustrate a few points. 1. He is not invested in authentically supporting communities, growing students, or supporting staff to do the former. He is a narcissist, and only interested in ensuring his place in history as an education entrepreneur. 2. He is abusive to students, and will sabotage them if they step out of line. 3. He is deeply and abidingly racist, regularly discriminates against black students and
staff, and is not open to change. Please do not move forward with any sale or lease to Seth Andrew. It will only result in more pain for a community of people that he has promised to help.

The worst part is that even as the charter school community is beginning to understand the horrors of “No Excuses” charter schools. Seth has doubled down on what an amazing thing he did for black and brown people, because of course, we were nothing before he came to Harlem. Seth stepped down from his role as leader of the Democracy Prep network in 2013, but his presence and impact lingers on. It can be seen in the leaders that he hired and promoted, who now occupy the senior leadership positions within the organization, and their policies. It can be seen in the school networks’ singular focus on media attention, instead of focusing on building great results for kids, and it can be seen in decision making that is always in the best interests of the adults, and not the students.

Seth recently reflected on his time at Democracy Prep in his essay, Reflections on Race & Democracy Prep. His reflection, however, is insufficient as he continues to center the narrative around himself and fails to acknowledge how he is still actively causing harm to the Democracy Prep community by attempting to minimize and call into question the recollections of the many people harmed. He also is actively deleting comments on his “reflection” that may present him in a negative light or are from people who have experiences that don’t fit his narrative. Further, he is being intentionally obtuse and there appears to be intentional inaccurate statements in his piece. For example, he states “I haven’t had any formal role at DP since 2013”, however the Democracy Prep Public Schools publicly filed 990 dated May 15, 2018 covering the period of 7/1/2016-6/30/2017, lists Seth as the Superintendent with a compensation package of $200K after his alleged departure with no “formal” role. Additionally, the timing of his reflection seems to suggest that his apology is a spin tactic to silence the work being done by Black N Brown at DP and to preserve his reputation as he prepares to launch Degrees of Freedom. We released a formal response to Seth in our essay, We Ain’t Buying It: A Response to Seth Andrew’s Reflections on Race & Democracy Prep.

As survivors of the harm Seth caused, we are incredibly concerned about your decision to allow him to open a college program on the Marlboro grounds. We hope that you read the stories on our page as well as our essays on Medium with an open mind and an open heart. The Seth Andrew that founded Democracy Prep in 2006 is not far from the Seth Andrew of today. While Degrees of Freedom would certainly breathe new life into the campus, create jobs, and help support the local economy; all of these things would happen at the cost of residents’ dignity, and humanity. And you would soon feel like many people in Harlem, wishing he would leave.

With Regards,
The Black N Brown at DP Team

If you choose to continue to engage with him, please ask the following questions:

Questions For Seth Andrew

Governance & Oversight

- Whom have you identified to be on your board of trustees thus far? Can they be reached out to?
- What, if any overlap, will there be between all of the Boards of the various Democracy Builders Initiatives? For example we see that the Current CEO of Democracy Prep Natasha Trivers is ALSO the Emeritus of the Creo College Prep Board.
- What percentage of your board members do you plan to bring on from the greater Marlboro/Vermont community?
• What are the target demographics of your program? What percentage of your board members are you planning to have match the demographics of the student base you plan to serve?
• What formal salaried role are you planning to take on at the college/program?
• What formal evaluation process does the Board of Trustees plan to use for YOU? Please share the document that describes this evaluation process?
• What formal structures for community, student, and family input are you going to have? Please share the document that describes these structures?

Strategic Planning
• What is the budget for your first 5 years of operations?
• How are you planning to raise this capital?
• What is your growth and sustainability strategy, given that there have been multiple ventures you have abandoned or could not sustain, including: AlumniRevolution.

Hiring and Staffing
• Who will oversee the initial hiring and staffing?
• What percentage of the staff do you plan to bring on from the greater Marlboro/Vermont community?

Reconciling The Past
• Founding a College Program requires a high degree of integrity, we are in possession of emails of your time as CEO and Founder of Democracy Prep that indicate, you are willing to ignore students wishes as well as standard practices of colleges/universities. (See images of verified emails) How do you respond to the criticism that you do not possess the level of integrity required to found and lead a college program?