June 7, 2020

Dear Baldwin Alumnae,

As we all try to process recent events and find ways to take action against the injustice we see around the nation and on our doorstep, I thank so many of you for being an active part of the conversation - in your own communities, with fellow alumnae, and with the School. At Baldwin, we have spent the past few days working to support our current students, faculty, staff and families. We have also been listening to other voices, including those of alumnae from whom I have heard via email, on social media, and by phone. So today I write to share specifics about our programs and plans, as well as personal thoughts on the past few days and weeks, and the weeks and months ahead.

First, let me assert that Baldwin unequivocally condemns the actions of individuals and systems that foment racism toward the black community, as we affirm that black lives matter. As a school, we stand with our black and brown students, families, faculty, staff and alumnae against racism and acts of hate in any way, shape, or form. This belief is central to our mission as educators committed to shaping young women prepared to make a lasting impact on the world. It reflects our core values of respect, honesty, compassion, responsibility, and learning, along with our community's desire to continually do better and to understand and celebrate our differences rather than use them to separate and divide us. And it upholds our belief that today's Baldwin girls are the future agents of change that will create a more just world for us all.

On a personal level and as someone who spent her early career in uniform, it infuriates me to know that all of us, and especially people of color in our community, do not experience the freedoms for which I fought. I see what is going on around the country, in Philadelphia, and right here in Montgomery County. I join you in feelings of grief, fear, and anger upon hearing of the senseless killing of George Floyd, the tragic shootings of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, and so many others whose names are seared in our collective memory. I acknowledge this is a time for us, as allies and supporters, to listen, to learn, and to stand together. Myself included.

Second, many alumnae have asked for specifics about what Baldwin is doing now and about what are our plans for the future, as we all recommit to work that advances the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Even as we are right now in a mode of listening to our students, to hear directly from them about what they feel and what they need, I want to share some other steps that Baldwin is taking and will continue to take during my tenure as Head of School:

- We created a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee using a shared leadership approach to ensure that faculty and staff across all divisions are empowered to take actions that foster cultural appreciation throughout our entire school and to support the growth of both students and adults. The DEI Committee helps provide professional development and resources to faculty and staff that advance the development of anti-racist curricula and practices; supports Building Bridges Day, our
annual day-long Upper School program focused on addressing diversity and identity in our community; and coordinates faculty, staff, and student participation in numerous conferences, including the National Association of Independent Schools’ People of Color Conference and Student Diversity Leadership Conference. We take pride in the fact that Committee members have shared their expertise beyond Baldwin, by authoring articles and presenting at major conferences.

- We have prioritized efforts to recruit and retain faculty and staff of diverse backgrounds, including contracting a minority-focused recruiting firm to augment internal recruitment efforts. We continue our steady work to ensure that teachers and other adult leaders of our school better reflect our highly diverse student body. On July 1st, we welcome two persons of color as the newest members of Baldwin’s senior administrative team, and I know that their perspectives will enrich our thinking and advance our growth as a school.

- We continue to closely examine our curriculum through the lens of diversity, equity and inclusion and to audit our academic departments’ programs on a regular basis, including through an external review process modeled after similar work at universities. A targeted focus of this process is an examination of where and how race is visible in our curriculum. Among other adjustments, the audit process led to changes in our Lower School curriculum including the introduction of discussions about slavery, protests, and issues of cultural disparity in age appropriate ways.

- In addition to this formal audit process, we are continuously adjusting the curriculum across all grades to more fully and accurately reflect the lived experiences and histories of all of our students. Highlights of this work include the introduction of the English Department’s "Black in America" course and the History Department’s redesigned "American Politics" course, which cover issues of race, identity and inequality.

- Opportunities to help our students engage important issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion outside of class include an expanded range of affinity groups in Middle and Upper School, Upper School Brown Bag lunches to provide space for students to explore their personal experiences, events like our annual Black Writers Read-In, and students’ regular participation in regional multi-school community diversity events.

These highlights reflect a small part of the work now underway at Baldwin. We will continue to examine and adjust over the months and years ahead through the lens of our students’ present experience, even as we also prepare our school, girls, and teachers to navigate campus reopening in the fall. This foundation provides us a framework to consider crucial next steps on race and equity issues through the lens of staffing, curriculum, and community engagement.

Third, I know Baldwin can always do more to engage these issues and support all members of our community. Please know this is always on my mind, even as we have focused on supporting our current students and teachers - to help them get through this week and the difficult months that preceded it and to lean into challenges ahead as we face unprecedented threats to our school from a global pandemic, potentially the worst economic depression since 1929, and civic unrest unlike any seen since the 1960s.

As this work continues, we must also find better ways, as a country and community, to understand and help dismantle systemic racism and closely related economic, educational, political and social inequities so that, together, we can build more hope for the future. That work continues here, in our own School. I hope that we can take time as alumnae to come together virtually, later this month, and share thoughts and ideas for what we can do as individuals and as a School moving forward. More details will be available shortly about how to participate in this online listening session for Baldwin alums, the week of June 22nd.

It gives me great hope to see so many of you reach out to the School and each other over the past few days - demonstrating by your actions the power of Baldwin’s mission, as we seek to empower today’s students with
the knowledge and voice to be advocates for positive change. Thank you for your commitment to that work and, as always, to Baldwin.

Sincerely,
Dr. Marisa Porges '96
Head of School