

THE BEMENT SCHOOL

Fly on your own wings

August 4, 2020

As our communities, countries, and world grapple with the implications of the recent calls for racial justice, in the midst of a pandemic that has exacerbated inequalities at the global, national, and local level, we at Bement hold ourselves accountable for preparing young people to navigate, thrive in, and make meaningful impacts on our present and future society. This commitment begins with our core values of compassion, integrity, resilience, and respect. However, recognizing the urgency of this unprecedented historical moment, it requires more. Our dedication to educating the whole child must prioritize diversity, inclusion, and equity. It also must explicitly avow the value of Black lives and actively assail structures that promote systemic racism. Our guiding philosophies and daily practices must foster curiosity about what is going on in the world as well as about the events, actions, and interests that led us here. At Bement, we encourage students to value experiences and viewpoints different from their own and cultivate their capacity to discern where and when such perspectives are missing.

Bement offers an idyllic and intimate setting for early education. Our school is a special place where children can grow comfortable probing difficult questions in a safe and supportive environment. At Bement, we have an opportunity to develop young people's appreciation of cultural differences as well as their passion for social justice. These qualities, if nurtured from a young age, become as natural as the air we breathe. Such virtues not only prepare students to succeed in contemporary society, they enhance their quality of life and wellbeing.

At Bement, we understand the power of education. How it has been complicit in shaping partial and unjust worldviews and how it can be even more impactful in empowering young people to boldly question the status quo, to stand against injustices wherever they encounter them, and to become catalysts for dismantling institutional racism. We aspire to promote these qualities in Bement students, with the hope that they will practice them over the course of their lives.

Diversity and inclusion have long been valued at Bement. As a community, we should recognize and celebrate our diversity mission that graces the walls of many rooms on campus, our regular cultural-exchange and service-learning opportunities that provide ninth-graders with life-changing experiences, and our 2008 mini-term on diversity, which produced the Diversity Mural displayed in the Kittredge Building's Tim Young Meeting Room. At the same time, we realize that valuing inclusion and equity is not a destination but rather an ongoing journey we must pursue every day.

Now more than ever, we understand how much work needs to be done and recognize that we have not always lived up to the values we espouse. We recognize how the burdens of diversity-related work have at times fallen on particular members of our community thought to represent difference rather than on the community as a whole. We recognize how school enrollments and the makeup of our faculty and staff have not reflected the racial and ethnic diversity of society or even our local region. We can no longer fall back on the excuse that the Pioneer Valley lacks diversity. We must do better.

Our pledge as a community is to act now to infuse Bement with people, practices, and policies across all areas of school life that dismantle racism and advance the causes of justice and equality for all. We undertake this effort with grave optimism, knowing that the work we must do will be challenging and vital, yet impelled by the promise and virtue of our students. For too long,

we have allowed obstacles to slow our progress toward realizing a more just and equitable school. Now, we will act by naming those obstacles and working past them, recalling the ancient words of Marcus Aurelius: "The impediment to action advances action." That which has stopped us before now will spur us on. We will confront the biases and privileges inherent in our community, challenge the assumptions that have stymied our efforts in the past, and never accept "good enough" in place of "right."

Beginning this summer with an employee book group studying Ijeoma Oluo's *So You Want To Talk About Race?*, Bement will foreground conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion across all areas of school life. Our aim will be to distribute the responsibility for confronting racism throughout the school community and calendar, so no one person or group bears the onus more or less and no one initiative or event serves as our community's only outlet for confronting these issues. We will take inventory of every program at Bement, from our classrooms to our dormitories and from our offices to our playing fields, lifting up practices and traditions that celebrate difference and identifying those that reinforce biases or stereotypes so we may enact change that combines the best of our past with the urgent need for a different future.

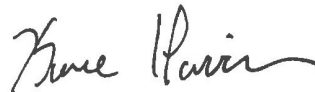
Bement's recruitment efforts, for adults and students alike, will go beyond treating all applicants equally regardless of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, ability, age, religion, and class; rather, we will actively seek to build relationships with communities of color to learn how we can embrace students, families, and employees of all backgrounds. To that end, we will invite our alumni of color to engage in a dialog about their experiences as an underrepresented group at Bement and in the world, listening to their stories and partnering with them to ensure that the Bement of today is an institution of which they can be proud.

Most importantly, on the eve of a new school year, we will commit to delivering an education that builds in our students the developmentally appropriate competencies needed to understand, confront, and dismantle racism in their communities. We began that work earlier this summer, when every Bement teacher chose from a menu of professional development options that broadened their toolkit of anti-racist pedagogies and capacities. Our charge now is to carry that learning forward into our campus spaces and curricula, leaving no stone unturned as we envision a Bement experience defined by a recursive and integrated focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

By acting, we also invite the reactions of our community. We expect to make mistakes, listen to those who feel wronged, and learn to do better together. In this work ahead, we seek partners who share our vision for a Bement that uplifts all and works to dismantle racism in our local and global environments. If you wish to join our efforts, please begin by sharing with us: we want to hear your stories, your hopes and fears, and your plans. We will go much farther together than we ever would alone. Let us begin anew.



Mike Schloat P'24 '26
Interim Head of School



Kwame Harrison '85
President, The Bement School Board of Trustees

