

### **Keisha Burgess – Davis '96, February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023**

“You have to see it to be it”. This famous quote by Billie Jean King has inspired many girls to see beyond the limitations of the stereotypes in our culture and follow their own path to achieve their goals. For the last few years, BHS has been inviting speakers to talk to students as part of a special ‘She Speaks Speaker Series’. In February, we celebrate Black History Month by welcoming back alumnae of colour as part of this series and were delighted to welcome Keisha Burgess-Davis '96 this morning.

Keisha was the first black Head Girl at BHS and has continued breaking ceilings throughout her career. In 2022, she became the first Black Bermudian woman to be Head of Premier Banking at HSBC.

In a captivating talk, Keisha took the students through her journey at BHS, where she joined as a new student in Year 7 from Francis Patton. She spoke about her trepidation of having to make new friends and how uncomfortable she felt at times. She recalled how a teacher reassured her that she belonged, she was meant to be at the school and that she was supported. Fast forward a few years and she was on the stage waiting to see who the new Head Girl would be! Keisha said she remembers seeing her mother in the audience but it still didn't hit her until they called her name. *“I remember the students in the audience from the youngest to the oldest stamping their feet and screaming....the acknowledgement of that achievement will sit with me for the rest of my life.”* Keisha told the audience that while she may not have appreciated the impact it had back then, she certainly realizes the importance of that representation on the QEH stage to other students now, *“Looking back, I see the impact it had on younger students who looked like me. It was a big deal and opened up so many opportunities and I was able to represent a lot of people.”*

Her journey was not a straight one, nor without setbacks. After moving up the ranks in the bank from an administrative role to a more senior role, and then manager, she applied for the role of Head of Premier but was unsuccessful. She spoke about her disappointment, but also about her resolve to achieve her goals and how she took the time to reflect, ask for feedback and develop her skills. *“When you don't succeed the first time, never give up if you want it. Never take no for an answer.”* When the opportunity presented itself again, she knew that she was ready and applied again. *“I walked away from the interview and said even if I don't get the role, I know I did everything to prepare myself and I'll try again if I don't get it, I know what I want.”* Her determination and hard work paid off and she was offered the job the next day. She said, *“It took me back to that stage at BHS – you never know what you can achieve if you don't try. Once you build that, nobody can take it away from you.”* She also realized that she was an example to the other women in the bank who had never seen a black woman in such a senior role; once again, they could see it and realise it was attainable. Setting that example is one of the most important things to her in her career her final message to the students was, *“It's not easy and it's not a straight road, but if you learn to surround yourself with positive people and take feedback and use it to sharpen your skills and tools you can do it. Work on yourself, be in competition with yourself.”*

At the end of the assembly, some younger students approached Keisha to share that they too had attended Francis Patton school – their delight at seeing a fellow alumna as such an accomplished and successful woman was palpable and was another shining example of “You have to see it to be it” in action. Thank you so much Keisha for taking the time out of your busy day to come and see us – it was a pleasure!