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BEVERLY DANIEL TATUM, Ph.D.  
*President*

October 19, 2009

Dear Members of the Spelman College Community,

I regret to inform you that 2009-10 will be the last year of operation for the Marian Wright Edelman Child Development Center at Spelman College. This is a very difficult decision, especially given the illustrious history of the Center. As you may know, during last year's budget discussions at the College, I indicated that the Center would have to close unless it could become self-sustaining. The subsidized cost to the College of running the Center is more than \$300,000 per year, when enrollments are close to full capacity (55). Unfortunately, we are far from capacity today – with only 13 students enrolled. Though many people enjoy the Center's presence on our campus, the fact is that the monthly cost of \$840 is prohibitive for many potential users and enrollment has steadily declined. Lowering the cost is not an option, given the need to cover at least a significant portion of our expenses. Parents have been notified of this decision, and it is important for all of you to be informed as well.

Last spring we made a decision to remain open another year, with the expectation of an enrollment of at least 30 children, with the hope of building enrollment to capacity. However, the child care landscape is changing and our cost structure is not competitive in today's environment. Though today's enrollment is well below what we expected it to be based on the information we had last spring, because of our stated commitment in May, we will not close until June 2010 in order to provide continuity of service to parents who enrolled their children this fall with the reasonable expectation that the Center would be open for the entire academic year.

While the emotional desire to maintain a beloved Center is strong, the financial realities are clear. The Center has been heavily subsidized for more than ten years, providing an excellent education to young children, but draining resources that now must be directed to other critical College needs. When faced with the choice between meeting urgent College needs such as increasing financial aid to retain current students, or subsidizing a significantly under-enrolled child care Center in a city with other child-care options available, the choice in the best interest of the College is clear, even if emotionally difficult.

Some may ask, "Why now?" The Center has been under-enrolled for years, and the College has still seen fit to keep it open. The answer is that the challenge of the current economy requires us to be strategically focused on our mission with laser-like precision in order to remain strong. Just as our predecessors decided in 1927-28 to close the nursing program and the Spelman elementary school to "center all the resources, human and material, on the development of a small, liberal arts college of high quality" (as noted in *The Story of Spelman College*), in this economic environment we, too, must center our resources on our top academic priorities. We must maintain our fiscal discipline and make this difficult choice.

We recognize the importance of high quality early childhood education. In fact, I am currently serving as the co-chair of the Early Learning Commission of the United Way, and am deeply involved in conversations about the value of early learning opportunities for long-term educational success. As an institution committed to community involvement, we expect to work closely with city leaders and local organizations to improve early learning opportunities across the city and to ensure that Spelman students interested in early childhood have the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in high-quality early learning centers. However, maintaining our own campus center is no longer the most beneficial way for us to achieve this goal. Ms. Andrea Johnson, the recently retained Director of the Center, will ensure a positive experience for children in this last year of operation, and will shepherd the closing process. She will also work with Dr. Johnnella Butler to coordinate our participation in the community-based efforts to develop quality early education in Atlanta.

I thank you for your understanding of the difficulty of this decision, and of its necessity.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Beverly Daniel Tatum". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Beverly Daniel Tatum, Ph.D.