



Buckingham Browne & Nichols School

October 1, 2010

Dear BB&N Parents, Alumni/ae, and Friends,

I smiled earlier this month when I heard our new Upper School Director Geoff Theobald explain to parents how much he has appreciated returning to the specific biorhythms that September's arrival ingrains in all of us whose lives revolve around school. Boy, do I second that appreciation! And I suspect that most BB&N parents (and alumni/ae parents of school-age children) are feeling the same way.

With September now in the rearview mirror and our US Back to School Night just concluded, I can tell you that the first month of school at BB&N has done nothing to lessen that appreciation and excitement, and, in fact, has only increased it.

I'd like to share with you some thoughts about a few items that have us particularly energized this year, some areas we'll be paying a lot of attention to, and end with an invitation for you to join us at an event later this month that I think will be the quintessence of what it is exactly that makes the BB&N community so special.

Opening Meetings and Emerging Themes

A defining moment for us occurs each year at opening meetings, when faculty and staff from all our campuses gather together for two days to plan for the ten months ahead. This year, a theme that emerged quite powerfully from these meetings was the "power of partnerships."

On August 31st, we were joined by Rob Evans, author of our summer reading assignment, *Family Matters*, a book which makes a compelling case for schools and families to find ways to improve their partnership.

Never, I believe, have parents had a harder job than they do right now. These are pressurized and anxious times for families in general, even more so since the economic downturn that started in Fall 2008. Because children are barometers of this anxiety, the fundamental question for us quickly turns to: How can we—parents *and* educators—help children thrive in times like these? The idea of a more effective partnership is key. An essential step, in Mr. Evans' view, is for schools and families to achieve consensus on purpose and conduct. What is purpose? It is BB&N being clear about what we stand for, what our core values are, what "makes us, us." And Evans defines conduct as a set of shared understandings about the "minimum non-negotiables" that are required of each of us as a member of the BB&N community.

Mr. Evans' ideas definitely sparked an eye-opening, sometimes provocative, discussion among us. Are there, in fact, core values of a BB&N education and are we expressing them clearly enough, explicitly enough? Are parents doing their part to reinforce at home these community-wide expectations? Is the relationship between the School and parents consistently geared toward the best interests of students? And if not, how do we get there? Questions abounded, but of this much we were certain: because the overarching goal is our students' success and well-being, we are convinced that these are conversations well worth staying engaged with as the year proceeds. As a matter of fact, we've made arrangements for Rob to return to campus on January 27th so that he can share his thoughts in a discussion with BB&N parents.

On the second day of opening meetings, we enjoyed a visit from Head of School Cindy Laba and Director of Admissions and Secondary School Placement Mervan Osborne of Beacon Academy in Boston. Beacon, founded in 2005, is a 14-month program that combines rigorous academic, social, and cultural experiences to prepare Boston-area students who have completed 8th grade for the challenges and opportunities of independent and competitive public exam high schools.

It was such an apt time for us to hear about Beacon's experiences, strategies, and tactics to help *all* students be successful, as their school's mission is one which overlaps in many important ways with the themes and subsequent actions that were set in motion by our E.E. Ford Achievement Study, which we conducted two years ago.

The "power of partnerships" principle rose to the fore at this meeting as well. Beacon showed a video featuring several of its graduates and it was an emotional moment for all of us in the auditorium when we saw appear on screen testimonials from three Class of 2010 graduates whom Beacon and BB&N share (and who are currently enjoying their freshman years at Tufts University, George Washington University, and Connecticut College). The sight of these young men and women on screen reminded us quite dramatically how magical it is that two very different schools can partner in helping to teach and nurture in students the skills to grow into "engaged learners, compassionate individuals, and productive citizens," as our mission statement pledges.

I've been thrilled to see the way our Achievement Study Task Force has tackled this challenge over the past two years. Faculty members on each campus have collaborated to draft a "Characteristics of Success" document (both overall and campus-specific), which explicitly defines the skills and characteristics, both tangible and intangible, that are necessary for a child to possess or acquire in order to be successful in the educational enterprise as it takes place at BB&N. Our charge now is to incorporate these findings into the way we teach and relate to our students and families.

The Importance of the Journey

Throughout all this work, however, we must be vigilant not to focus on outcomes alone, at the expense of the journey itself. Some may call it a truism, but a school that honors the journey is education at its finest. Indeed, the importance of each student's journey at BB&N has been much on our minds in recent years and has, I think, helped create on our campuses an environment and culture that's never been healthier or more joyful.

Tour our campuses any day of the week and you'll see what I mean. Here are three recent slices of BB&N life to illustrate the point:

- Who knew that five-year-olds and composting bins would make such a well-matched pair? It was a delight last week to watch our Beginners keep the Lower School's composting efforts up to snuff, one banana peel at a time. It's all part of a larger "Sustainability Project" started last year when Lower School faculty were awarded a grant to create garden plots, which all LS grades will maintain over the course of the year. One of the most exciting parts of this project, as Beginner teacher Anthony Reppucci noted in the grant proposal, is the opportunity it provides "to teach children of the technology era in creative ways."
- At the Middle School, on the other hand, science teacher Brian Fehlau makes creative use of computers in order to reach some very willing citizens of the "technology era": a class of eighth graders. The students in his lab used iStopMotion, a software program that employs stop-motion animation—the act of taking single pictures of objects, and then moving the objects a tiny bit between exposures—to produce their very own piece of animated movie magic: a demonstration of how chemical bonds occur. Especially successful was the group of students who cleverly used animated swimming fish to illustrate the concept of free-flowing electrons in metallic bonds.
- Last week at Upper School assembly, the English Department announced the award winners among last spring's Junior Profile writers. One of BB&N's integral academic experiences in which every student immerses her/himself, the Junior Profile presents our eleventh graders the assignment of researching and writing in-depth portraits of a professional on the job, from butcher to yoga instructor to grave digger. To me, these profiles are marvels not only of ultimate product (some of which, in my opinion, would absolutely be worthy of publication in newsstand magazines), but also of process. The depth of engagement that the project requires of our students, the way in which it demands first-rate work and refuses to let students settle for the easy path, and the care with which our faculty guide these explorations, all combine to create an educational experience which, frankly, would inspire envy among many colleges. And this is an experience, a learning journey, that holds true across all subject areas at the Upper School.

And let's be clear. No journey comes without a bump or two. Whether they're on the playground, on the computer, or on the Bivouac grounds, children of all ages make mistakes and we'd be naïve to think otherwise. But, as LS Director Sue Scarborough told Lower School parents recently, "Often, it's when children make mistakes that real learning starts." Here is our philosophy, though, when mistakes such as these are made: 1) As members of this community, we do not deal in rumors; 2) Similarly, as members of this community, we make sure that we do not target anyone; and 3) We use these incidents as prompts for "real learning" to take place, as opportunities for us to guide students in their growth, and occasional stumbles, toward genuine understanding of the values of honor, scholarship, and kindness that define BB&N.

Construction Update, Enrollment News, and Financial Overview

Several construction projects were completed this summer that have also played a vital part in making the journey more enjoyable for BB&N students on opposite ends of the age spectrum. The Lower School's Morse Building continued its transformation into a 21st-century showpiece with the installation of a brand-new front playground area. Play is serious educational business for this age group, and the report from Sue Scarborough (whose office window looks onto the playground) is that the new space is garnering rave reviews from our Beginners and Kindergartners. Over at 80 Gerry's Landing, the biggest changes that greeted Upper Schoolers this fall were the Academic Center that houses our academic support team, and a brand-new science laboratory (the Upper School's sixth), boasting four sinks, a fume hood, gas hookups, and SmartBoard technology. The lab will serve as the new home of Honors and AP Physics students this year; it's also equipped for biology and chemistry instruction.

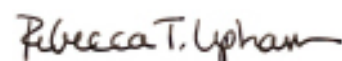
Our facilities from Beginners through Grade 12 have certainly been put through their paces during the first month of school. Enrollments are robust at BB&N—no small matter, as any independent school in the country will attest. Last spring, our Admission Office encountered stronger demand among prospective Upper School students than economic indicators had suggested. The end result has us all excited: the largest Grade 9 *and* schoolwide enrollment yet seen at BB&N—all the more exhilarating because this is a truly strong incoming group of students, all of whom already have begun making significant contributions the BB&N community across all three campuses.

I am very pleased to report on one of our most meaningful continuing trends: the way in which BB&N has stayed the course on its commitment to financial aid. Over the past six years, even amidst a sobering economic climate, the School has nearly doubled its financial aid budget, from \$3.1 million in 2004 to \$6.1 million this year (helping 24 percent of our students attend BB&N). This commitment has had tremendous impact. We believe that BB&N students learn and benefit perhaps as much from their peer group as they do from teachers and coaches. Financial aid is an indispensable tool to ensure that every new class of students that arrives at BB&N is as smart, talented, diverse, engaged, and just downright interesting as can be found anywhere.

The school's finances are strong. Revenues remain healthy and our endowment continues to weather these turbulent times in heartening fashion, registering a six percent increase between FY09 and FY10, which compares well with similar institutions. Perhaps most remarkably, 2009-10 was a stalwart year for our Annual Fund, setting several records and raising more than \$2.4 million, a 13 percent increase over the previous year. This fall, BB&N enters a crucial phase: the final year of our \$62 million Opening Minds Campaign. "Finish Strong" is our buzzword as we seek to raise the final \$4.3 million in endowment funds to reach our Campaign goal.

And speaking of buzz, I'd like to end this letter with a pitch for you to join us at an event that's generating a whole lot of it. BB&N is holding a "Night of Knights" celebration (www.bbns.org/celebration) at the Nicholas Athletic Center on Saturday evening, October 23rd, and it's going to be a blast. I know that our faculty (current *and* emeriti/ae), parents, and alumni/ae are registering in droves, and we hope you'll be able to take part in the festivities, too.

With best wishes for a rewarding
and enjoyable year ahead,



Rebecca T. Upham
Head of School