



# Buckingham Browne & Nichols School

January 7, 2010

## An Update on Our Efforts to Ensure the Safest Possible Environment at BB&N

Students returned this week from a well-deserved winter break and are now galloping to the end of the first term which concludes later this month. I'm writing, as I mentioned I would in my April 2009 letter, with an update on the steps we have taken to help any alumni/ae adversely impacted by Ted Washburn as well as a series of action steps to help ensure the safest possible environment at BB&N now and in the future. Many of these initiatives are ongoing.

- The referral system for assistance for emotional injury remains in place. We launched the service in October 2008 and have periodically made adjustments to ensure that the service works smoothly and confidentially. It may be contacted anonymously by any member of our alumni/ae community affected by Washburn and information on how to access this service continues to reside on the alumni/ae page of BB&N's website. Here is the link that will take you to that information: [www.bbns.org/10.10.08\\_letter](http://www.bbns.org/10.10.08_letter).
- Our quest to create a "permanent, confidential reporting system" has resulted in a fuller understanding of this issue. In researching the confidential reporting systems that are used in college settings, we concluded that the key difference for our School is that as an elementary and secondary school and a mandated reporter, BB&N cannot, should not, and will not keep or treat confidentially or anonymously any report of abuse. Therefore, in thinking about how to move this initiative forward, we returned to our goal: to create an environment and a mechanism which encourages students to come forward with concerns about abuse. We have learned that the most effective systems for abuse prevention and reporting make available to students multiple channels of communication. At BB&N, not only do we have teachers, advisors, and Class Deans to whom students can turn, but also a counselor and a nurse. This past year, we added an All-School Coordinator of Psychological and Learning Support Services to ensure not only that there are multiple communication channels but that these channels are coordinated. The new Coordinator is based on the Upper School campus.

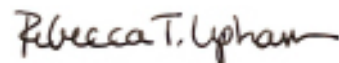
In addition to beefing up our counseling services, we have been piloting an online outreach mechanism this fall. "Ask a Knight," run by our Peer Counselors, enables any Upper School student to submit a question or comment either from their School email account or from any external email address. "Ask a Knight," which is screened by the School Counselor, is an opportunity to get feedback from a trained helper about a social, academic, family, or personal issue. It is neither a crisis/emergency hotline nor a way to get urgent or emergency care. It is, however, an important vehicle for opening up dialogue and for building a student community and culture which encourages people to bring forward any concern they might have.

- With respect to recommendations that have come out of several discussions with the student council, we have identified for students the members of the faculty and staff to whom they can go with concerns about inappropriate behavior. People identified for this role include the Head of School, the Director of the Upper School, the Dean of Students, and the School Counselor. Not only can students come to these people but teachers and advisors can refer concerns to them as well. This spring, we will follow up on another recommendation that came out of the student council: we will make available to students a workshop on abuse, not specifically related to BB&N.
- The faculty committee which met with me and consulting psychiatrist Dr. Michael Jellinek recommended that the School dedicate more training and attention to appropriate student-faculty interaction and more training on abuse. This fall, Dr. Jellinek spoke with the faculty. It was an opportunity to talk about the qualities that make students unique and how we establish appropriate boundaries with them. His presentation, and the discussions which ensued, spoke to both issues identified by the faculty committee. The faculty have requested that Dr. Jellinek return for a follow-up session and he has agreed to do so.

All of the steps we've taken – and more – have contributed to strengthening the fabric of our School and to the openness with which students and faculty approach issues of concern. We certainly have better channels for counsel and advice than we did previously and the great news is that these channels are getting used. Issues now coming forward regularly are both personal (e.g., concern about a friend) and professional (e.g., a teacher's question about what constitutes an appropriate response to a situation.) This fall, an outside 12-member team of evaluators spent three days at BB&N as part of the School's reaccreditation process. I am especially proud of their assessment of the experience that students have at our school: the outside evaluators gave BB&N the highest possible mark (exemplary) on the experience of our students, noting that the School "has multiple support personnel and systems in place to assist students, faculty, and families" and commending the School "for creating a comfortable and welcoming environment" for students.

As I mentioned in my letter of October 2008, the initiatives we've undertaken are works in progress. BB&N will continue to evolve and develop appropriate and thoughtful programming to safeguard students of all ages. You may look here at the end of 2010 for another update.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca T. Upham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

Rebecca T. Upham  
Head of School