



# Buckingham Browne & Nichols School

October 9, 2009

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

While it is a given that every school year at BB&N opens with high spirits, I have noticed that this year seems to have begun with an especially crackling sense of excitement and anticipation. I would like to share with you some of the schoolwide news, happenings, and initiatives that have us so energized about the year ahead.

A big reason for this abundant energy is the theme of “connectedness” that frames our thinking about the 2009-10 year. This critical area was writ large in the findings from the Achievement Study that we have been working on during the past two years: namely, that student achievement and success correlate closely to how connected or not the student feels to her/his experience at school. This essential idea served as the motif of our opening meetings in early September, at which Harvard Professor (and former BB&N parent and trustee) Richard Light led a faculty discussion concerning how we can best approach, encourage, and facilitate this sense of connectedness in the lives of all our students, no matter what their age.

I know the conversation and ideas that were sparked on opening day will remain at the center of an ongoing dialogue (as well as our faculty’s professional development) this year, the end result of which will be a sharpened focus on connectedness that will yield benefits in every one of our classrooms, laboratories, studios, and playing fields; that will resonate every time a teacher or advisor checks in with a student or parent; and that will build a deeper and more meaningful sense of community throughout our three campuses every time a student discovers her/his “go to” person at BB&N—be it a classroom teacher, a mentor, or merely a faculty member who takes an informal but special interest in her/his activities.

Conversations about connections have spilled out of our daily interactions with students and into some interesting discussions about program. I know that Sandy Dow, senior spring project coordinator, has reached out to Professor Light to investigate ways BB&N could adjust the structure of the upcoming spring project period to capitalize on some of his fascinating work on student connectedness. I look forward to seeing what comes out of the exchange.

I am extremely proud of the progress that BB&N has made in recent years in becoming more centered on creating the optimal experience for each and every one of our 987 students. Some recent examples of this progress include the hiring of Kim Gold last year to serve in the newly created position of all-school coordinator of psychological and learning support services; our emphasis on improving the communication between and among teachers, advisors, and families during the course of the year; and the very successful changes to the sixth grade curriculum last year, which have resulted in our sixth graders now receiving instruction in every subject in the curriculum under the tutelage of a teacher who is a subject area specialist. Progress in this area often has been facilitated by BB&N parents, such as those who came together last year to establish the South Asian Parents Alliance (SAPA). SAPA’s goal is to serve as a resource in helping the School gain a richer understanding of this region of the world. In both spirit and process, these parents are building on the commitment of the Parents’ Association to support the School and to connect with all families in our community.

Although the School year is only a month old, we already have a lot of exciting news to share from our three campuses.

First up is an announcement that I have been looking forward to for months. Earlier this week, we introduced the first three faculty recipients of BB&N’s newly endowed teaching chairs and instructorship, an exciting “first” in BB&N’s history. In this way, thanks to the extraordinary generosity of three early donors to the Opening Minds Campaign, BB&N has gained an important, tangible way to celebrate the outstanding dedication and talent of our finest teachers and future leaders, and to recognize the exceptionally valuable contributions these faculty members have made to the life of the School. The chairs and instructorship will rotate every three and two years respectively and the inaugural recipients

have set a high bar for colleagues who follow: Rob Leith, Upper School teacher of English and Art History, has been awarded the Founding Paideia Master Teacher Chair; Margaret Hardy, Middle School chair of World Languages and a Buckingham graduate of the Class of 1961, has been awarded the Jeanette Markham Master Teacher Chair; and Caitlin Drechsler, Lower School Science teacher, was honored with the Marian W. Vaillant Future Leader Instructorship. Be sure to check the School website to learn more about the chairs and the recipients! ([Click here to read the story.](#))

Our “connectedness” theme played a large part, literally, in the most exciting change at the Lower School this year, one that was unveiled on the first day of School this September when the Beginner program began its first year as a full-day program. This change not only improves the pace and sequencing of activities for our youngest students, it also allows for more creativity in program delivery, richer social experiences, and ample physical activity. This enhancement to the program was made possible by a wonderful renovation of the Beginner space in the Morse Building that was completed over the summer. We have opened up new worlds of experience for our youngest students and their teachers by breaking down walls—connecting classroom to classroom with dynamic shared space areas for activities such as big blocks and dramatic play, art ateliers, and even a kitchen that will serve as a springboard for learning about things such as counting and measuring. I’m thrilled to report that both the expanded program and the renovated space have met with rave reviews these first few weeks of school. ([Click here to see a photo gallery of the renovated Beginner classrooms.](#))

At the Middle School, I have been impressed with the thoughtful and creative ways in which teachers are integrating technology into the classroom. Thanks to the leadership of the Academic Technology Advisory Group, we are now seeing teachers and students exploring ways to build collaborative classrooms by using blogs, wikis, and other web 2.0 tools, as well as fascinating ideas for teaching with multimedia, such as creating authentic projects with audio and video tools. The Knights Broadcasting Club (KNBC), a multimedia club launched by Rachel Jamison at the Middle School last year, is an excellent illustration of how this sort of approach can connect students to learning by providing them with an engaging forum in which to express their ideas. ([Click here to access one of KNBC’s pages: a compendium of “radio essays” produced by our seventh graders.](#))

A week ago, the Upper School’s College Counseling Office shared some terrific news that speaks volumes about the remarkable capabilities of our students, as well as the quality of the learning environment that our teachers work so hard to foster at BB&N. Every year, close to 28 percent of the senior class receives recognition from the National Merit and College Board groups. This year, nine BB&N students have advanced in the competition and qualified as National Merit Scholar semifinalists, a tremendous showing that places BB&N as one of the top three private schools in the region. Congratulations to these scholars!

Another indication of the strength of this School and our students were the stunningly successful college placement results earned by BB&N’s Class of 2009 last spring, even amidst one of the most challenging college recruiting environments ever encountered. The first question that new senior parents tend to ask us about this topic is, “How did BB&N fare with the usual suspects in the Northeast?” The answer is, great! This past spring, we saw 9 students accepted by Harvard, 5 by Yale, 30 by the other Ivies, and 4 by MIT. But even more important, I like to remind parents, is the marvelous way that every single one of our seniors found a home in a college or university (65 different ones last year) that is well suited to their individual strengths, needs, and interests.

If the past few months are any guide, it occurs to me that the next big project for our architects might need to be the construction of a jumbo-sized trophy case at the Upper School. Although I don’t have the space to list them all, I would like to share at least a few honors which have been accorded to BB&N students recently:

- Talene Monahon ’09 won the prestigious 2009 English-Speaking Union of the United States National Shakespeare Competition last spring;
- Upper School science students (Suvayan Roy ’11, Natalie Kingston ’12, and Kris Boelitz ’12) continued BB&N’s stranglehold on the medal stand of Massachusetts Society for Medical Research’s annual poster competition;
- Niklas Smedemark-Margulies ’09 won first place in the Intermediate division of the national Chinese Language Speech Contest sponsored by UMass Boston last April;
- Our student-athletes are not only performing at the highest level on the field, but are being saluted for their scholastic merits as well, as demonstrated by the record-setting four BB&N football players (Michael DiChiara, Xander Frantz, Steve Grassa, and Philippe Panico, all ’09) who received National High School Scholar-Athlete Awards last spring.

Now that our ninth graders have returned from Bivouac just over a week ago, it feels like the 2009-10 year has finally begun in earnest. As we look ahead, I would like to point out several important initiatives and issues that will continue to receive our close attention as the fall term progresses.

Later this month, BB&N will host a visiting committee from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), an important stage of the reaccreditation process that occurs every 10 years. Last year, the self-study portion of this process offered every member of our faculty, staff, and administration an excellent opportunity to review how well we are fulfilling our mission as a School.

We also look forward to rolling up our sleeves this year and continuing to transform recommendations from our Achievement Study Task Force into tangible action steps. This groundbreaking study, funded by the E.E. Ford Foundation, will leave deep footprints not just at BB&N, but nationwide. We are the first independent school in the country to address this complex and often challenging issue, a fact that should give all of us in the BB&N community great pride.


Another priority for the School during the fall term is to successfully conclude our quest for a permanent, confidential system (perhaps with a web-based component) for reporting abuse or neglect. This initiative springs from our commitment to creating the safest possible environment at BB&N now and in the future.

Of course, BB&N does not exist in a vacuum and we are certainly mindful of the impact that the current economic downturn has had on family and school budgets. Because of an outpouring of response from our community last fall, the School was able to provide assistance totaling \$409,000 to the families of 31 students who had urgent and unexpected need for financial aid for the current year. The purpose of this transitional assistance is to help stabilize households and give families the time needed to make adjustments. We are also aware, however, that we cannot continue to fund families at this level on an ongoing basis (we did it last year at the expense of roofs and building maintenance). Challenges such as this one demonstrate very clearly why our Board of Trustees continues to focus on the issue of how best to support the School's aspirations with a financially sustainable model that will ensure future stability for BB&N.

Just last week I met with the Board's Investment Committee for a review of the performance of our endowment. What an impressive, thoughtful, committed group we have overseeing this critical area. At a time when many colleges and universities are posting investment losses well north of 20 percent (e.g., 27% for Harvard and Stanford; 25% for Yale), by the time all was said and done, BB&N's endowment posted a loss of only 13 percent for 2008-09! (Whoever thought there would be a time when I'd be excited about a loss of that magnitude, but given the times we're in, I'm pleased to proclaim it.)

Finally, in this year of connectedness, I want to thank you for the myriad ways in which you—whether as alumnus/a, student, parent, or friend—remain connected to this amazing School and its mission. You make us a better School, and for that we are enormously grateful.

With best wishes for a rewarding  
and enjoyable year ahead,



Rebecca T. Upham  
Head of School