



All-School Meeting Opening Remarks from Head of School Chris Kolovos September 2, 2020

Good morning everybody, and welcome! It's so great to see all your smiling faces. I am Mr. Kolovos, and I'm thrilled to get started this year. Your teachers and I could not be more excited to welcome you back today.

It has been six months. Six months since any of us have been in school, and that is far too long. And I know that as much as you missed your classes, what you really missed is us being together -- you missed one another. I'm thrilled that we are at a school where we've done the work to make that happen.

We are starting school at an extraordinary time. We are experiencing a pandemic the likes of which this country -- this world -- has not seen for over a century. I wish that that was the only challenge facing us right now. We continue to struggle with systemic racism and racial tension in this country. We have an ongoing climate crisis, which remains largely unaddressed and even denied. We have deeper political division in this country than we've seen in a very long time, at a time when we desperately need unity and common sacrifice.

As I think about these four challenges, I'm struck that adults have, in large part, failed you; that the institutions that we have trusted in past generations have failed. We are living in an extraordinary time.

This brings to mind a quote from one of my favorites, *The Lord of the Rings*; I know many of you love Tolkien like I do. I think of the passage when Frodo turns to Gandalf and says, "I wish it need not have happened in my time." Gandalf replies, "So do I. And so do all who live to see such times, but that is not for us to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us." I'll say it again. "All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

So my question for all of you this morning and this year is, What will you do in this moment? Some of you might ask, What could I possibly do when faced with these four great crises of our times? The answers are all around this Zoom room. I'm inspired by so many of you that I've gotten to know these last few months.

When I think about the pandemic, I think about the chance we all have collectively to be the national model that this country needs right now. Folks are watching BUA. We are the only

school I know of where every student and every faculty member is being tested on a regular basis. When many schools are starting remotely, or starting with just one or two days of classes, we are going to be together for four days a week in person. Folks are watching us because they are looking for a model for how this can work. Some of you have stepped up already with special efforts. I'm so grateful to Rohan and Lizzie for the video that they produced last week, showing us, with a little bit of humor, what it means for us to all be together in a community.

It's not just the two of them. There are things each of us can and must do: we can each wear our masks and do it right; keep our distance; wipe down our desks on the way in and out of the classroom; do our symptom screening in the morning; sign up for your COVID tests and take them; stay home when we need to.

But here's the hardest part: being an upstander in this moment. The hard part is actually not taking care of yourself -- it's when a classmate or a friend is not doing it right. Whether they're coming in for a hug and forget about distancing, or aren't wearing their mask correctly, or maybe not acting responsibly outside of school. It's up to you to say something. That's what's going to keep us all safe and that's what's going to make us the model that this country needs right now.

You might ask, What can I do about climate change or police violence or racial tension or the state of political discourse in this country? And that's when I think about Phevos, and Benista, and Sudarshan, and Kieran, who came to me and Dr. White earlier this summer and said that they really wanted to do something to move our community forward on issues of race and inclusion. So we worked with them on a survey that many of you took to try to get a sense of what the lived experience of students is here. They have very thoughtfully and thoroughly analyzed that data, which is leading to insights that will drive the priorities of this school around diversity, equity, and inclusion for the coming years. We are going to partner with them and with all of you on that work to propel us all forward.

Around environmental challenges, maybe you will decide to devote your senior thesis work to research on climate change, or maybe you will take on a project or a class at the University that addresses climate change. Maybe around politics you decide to actually get involved. Some of you can vote. Most of you can't, but you can still get involved. You can still canvas for a candidate that you believe in. But here's what you can do right here at home: you can make sure that the conversations in our classrooms are the kind of conversations we should be having in this country. We're open to opposing ideas, we hear them out. We are clear about our principles and norms, holding ourselves to appropriately higher standards for what it means to be an inclusive, caring community. And, in the best BUA fashion, we move forward together. Change starts at home. Then we can be the model that schools and communities outside of here need.

There's a quote that you are going to hear from me a lot over the years: "From those to whom much has been given, much is expected." I'll say it again: "From those to whom much has been given, much is expected." All of you -- all of us -- have been given so much. You come to this school partially because of your talents, which you have cultivated over time. You come from supportive families who've given you so much. You have got teachers who care about you and who love you and who mentor you. And you have this school, where we get to be together this year in a learning community, when a lot of other students -- even right down the street -- don't get that opportunity. We have all been given so much.

And so we are going to expect a lot from you, and you should expect a lot from one another and from the adults in this community. It's time for you to find the ways, big and small, that you can move our community forward, and in so doing, move the broader community forward.

In that spirit, we are going to start a new tradition right here this morning. I've asked Phevos Paschalidis, President of the BUA Student Council, to address you. This is a new tradition for BUA, but one that is entirely consistent with its history. This is not a community of and for adults. This is a community about students and adults working together. And so I want you to not just hear from me. So I'll hand it over to Phevos with one last wish for all of you. Let's have a great year together. We're in this together, and we can't wait to see you.