



Reflection from Chris Kolovos, Incoming Head of School February 6, 2020

Dear BUA Community,

As I prepare to join the BUA family in July, I have had the great pleasure of immersing myself in the life of the school during two visits, first in October, and more recently in January -- sitting in on two dozen classes; hearing from students in grade meetings, over lunch, and in the hallways; cheering on BUA's teams on the field and on the court; getting to know this passionate and talented faculty and staff; talking with parent volunteers; connecting with alumni; and working closely with Dr. White and her excellent team. I am so grateful for the warm welcome and for the community's partnership in these early days.

I also had the honor of meeting roughly 60 prospective families at the Evening with the Head of School event in January and offering them some reflections about my visits to campus. I'm writing to share those thoughts with all of you as well.

I have admired BUA for many years, knowing the school for its excellent reputation. Since that day a year ago when I learned that BUA was engaged in a search for its next head of school, I have learned so much more. The more I have learned, the deeper I've fallen in love with this great school.

I use "great" advisedly. I had the good fortune to attend a nearby independent school that changed my life; I have taught and led at two other excellent schools; and I have visited several others as part of accreditation teams. Those experiences give you a sense of what separates great schools from the rest. At BUA, I've seen all the hallmarks of a great school.

Great schools inspire a culture of curiosity. During my visit last month, I spent the morning with the ninth and tenth graders. As we sat together on the gym floor, I asked students to share with me what they loved most about BUA and why they made the choice to spend their high school years here. Hands shot right up around the room, and one tenth grader offered something that will stay with me. She explained that at her old school, there were a handful of kids like her -- who loved reading, loved talking about ideas -- and those were her friends. But when she came to BUA, she explained, everybody was like that. She was not judged for being curious, bright, and engaged; here, those things are expected and celebrated. As she put it, "At BUA, I found my people."

I have seen that sincere desire to learn everywhere at BUA: in the senior elective, "Democracy and its Discontents," where students were so engaged in the conversation that they were disappointed when the period was over, and so continued the conversation in the hallway; in the robotics lab (what a gift to have access to a state-of-the-art dedicated university facility), where students on their own initiative were designing, building, and iterating to get ready for the next competition; in the chemistry classroom, where a student asked for an extra homework assignment to help her explore the topic more deeply (yes, more homework!); in the Model UN club, where student leaders took the initiative to train the next generation of budding diplomats; in my conversations with seniors over pizza, as they described their senior thesis projects mentored by BU professors, BUA faculty, and outside researchers. There are many schools with high expectations and rigorous programs. That rigor, though, does not always travel with curiosity. At BUA, the two go hand in hand.

The best schools wrap that intellectual curiosity in a culture of kindness, compassion, and community. The first words of BUA's mission statement describe a "caring high school community," and there is a consistency here

that is rare. BUA is not a place where there are pockets of kindness; treating one another well permeates the culture. Over my visits this fall and winter, I've seen warm smiles and genuine interest on the faces of the students as I've greeted them on their way into All-School Meeting -- no small thing for teenagers at 7:50 on a blustery morning. I've watched students around a conference table actively making room in the conversation for their classmates, listening intently, and disagreeing without being disagreeable. Seniors volunteered to lead tours on days when their BU classes were not in session and they had no other commitments on campus. I was particularly struck by a conversation with the leaders of the Student Council. This was not a group focused on the traditional topics of dress code and dance planning. Last year, concerned about access and equity for their classmates, they proposed and initiated a textbook swap on campus. Great schools care most about what kind of person a student is. These young people sincerely and consistently care about one another and about their community.

Most important, every great school is built around adults who know and care about the kids. If you take a moment to picture a special teacher from your past, someone who made a positive impact on your life, the great majority of you will think of someone whose strengths went far beyond content expertise. That teacher saw you -- understood you for the person that you were. Maybe that teacher saw something in you that you didn't even see yourself. When I ask students to describe the best things about BUA, they invariably talk about the passionate, caring, talented adults in the community. They describe times when those teachers met with them outside of class to work through something tricky or to stoke some ember of curiosity. They also describe being understood. An alumnus shared an anecdote with me back in January. He told me a story about one of his favorite BUA English teachers who, when this alum was finishing up at BUA, reflected back on the student's journey from a "surly ninth grader" to a "true romantic." Colorful words for sure (and I can't imagine that this alum was ever surly), but what a beautiful moment of being seen. We know from the research of Dr. Michael Reichert and others that teaching is deeply relational. Students learn best from people they like and trust. What a gift to have teachers who consistently live that mission.

As a young person, I was extraordinarily lucky to grow up in a school community where curiosity was the norm, kindness was the expectation, and teachers were mentors. That changed my life. The reason I do this work and the reason I am so honored to devote my career to BUA is that it offers me the chance to give back for all I've been given -- to preserve and nourish this culture so infused with a love of learning and commitment to community, and to make sure that this kind of education is accessible to generations of young people from all corners of the Boston area. And when I look out across BU's campus and consider all the opportunities this world-class university offers our students beyond the typical high-school curriculum, opportunities no other high school can match, it becomes clear that BUA is not just a great school, but truly unique in the American educational landscape and a model of what kind, curious, capable young people deserve.

I am so grateful to be joining this community, and I very much look forward to building a partnership with all of you over the coming months and years.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher Kolovos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chris Kolovos
Incoming Head of School