

Dear BUA Family,

I hope this note finds you all healthy and happy as we approach the new year. For some of you, I imagine these past two weeks have been filled with board games, puzzles, and cooking as a family. Maybe you've been catching up on sleep, restarting exercise habits, and connecting with friends. Whatever the break has been like for you, I hope it has been a good one. My wife Tracey, our toddler Charlie, and I have hunkered down at home. What a gift. I'll cherish the memories of him pointing to my guitar and asking me to play Jingle Bells; him taking my hand and leading me to the pantry to get him a snack ("nack, Baba, nack"); and the three of us on the couch reading about Little Blue Truck's adventures with his good friend Toad.

As we prepare to come back together as a community, I wanted to reach out to share some reflections on the fall and a preview of things to come.

A Difficult Fall and a Caring Community

It has been an especially difficult semester. The tragic loss of Dr. Formichelli took a toll on all of us – particularly those students and staff members who were closest to her. That acute shock came at a time when we were all also experiencing ongoing disappointment about the trajectory of the pandemic; the stubborn persistence of this virus has upended the hopes we all shared that this would finally be the school year where we put COVID behind us.

Those challenges have also brought out the best in us. The outpouring of love at our all-school meeting remembering Dr. Formichelli, the hundreds of candles at the evening vigil, the beautiful words shared in writing, the quiet moments where friend comforted friend – so many people in this community rallied to support one another and Jennifer's family. As difficult as it was, we moved on together, finding strength in routine and one another. I've seen that same resilience in response to the pandemic. Without complaint, each member of this community wears a mask, tests twice a week, and does their part to keep us safe and learning in person. Knowing that we need community moments now more than ever to keep our spirits up, students and teachers have organized dances, breakfasts, dodgeball tournaments, and other rally points. I continue to be amazed at the resolve and warmth of our community. And I feel so fortunate to be working with this extraordinary faculty and staff who have, at every turn, prioritized the well-being of the young people in our care.

COVID and Return from Break

In recent weeks, you have received two updates about the school's response to the pandemic – [one before break](#) and one just [earlier this week](#). Thank you for reviewing those, particularly the **requirement for a negative PCR test before returning to classes** and uploading evidence of a booster. The news about Omicron is sobering, and we are monitoring the data closely. But we are committed to **learning and being in person** as the semester opens, confident in our protocols, and informed by our experience last winter, where together we weathered that spike with very few cases and no disruption to school. We will, as always, stay in close touch with you as we begin the semester and as we continue to adjust.

Focused on Wellness, Mental Health, and Community

The well-being of our students is our top priority, and addressing the mental health of our students has never been so important. Later this winter, we will **host world-renowned clinical psychologist and author [Dr. Lisa Damour](#) for virtual talks** with our parents (1/31), students (2/1), and faculty/staff (2/2). Dr. Damour's work focuses on the emotional lives of young people; at BUA, she will offer strategies for emotional regulation and speak to the experience our students are living through. You may have read her [excellent August New York Times piece](#) on supporting students as they return to school. Registration information for the parent event to follow.

In February, our **students will also be participating in the Independent School Health Check (ISHC)**. This is a national survey for middle and high school students. Soon after the survey, we will receive a report with a school-specific analysis benchmarked against peer schools in areas including nutrition, sleep, internet use/misuse, academic pressure, and social life. Our aim is to use this information to make data-driven decisions about how best to support our community.

As the accumulated strain of the pandemic piles up, it is critical that we keep finding ways to let kids be kids and that we are smart about balancing concerns about physical safety with mental health concerns. The indoor/outdoor dance in November was a highlight of the semester, as was the faculty-student dodgeball tournament, Fall Fest, the girls' soccer championship game, and Brunch on the (BU) Beach.

Over the coming days and weeks, you will be hearing about other community rally points. On January 7, we will host a [community skate at Walter Brown Arena \(click to register\)](#). Seniors have been invited to a **New Year's Senior Soiree** on January 10 for some cocoa, competition, and camaraderie. BUA's **Winter play, Shakespeare's *As You Like It***, will be held on January 21-23 and will be open to students and families. Our sports teams continue their winter seasons; we encourage students and parents to come watch. And there's more to come.

A Commitment to Inclusion

In the summer of 2020, in the wake of George Floyd's murder and the Black Lives Matter movement entering a new phase, I promised that BUA would maintain its focus on inclusion, not as a temporary reaction to a moment in time, but as an ongoing commitment to our mission's values. This year, for the first time, our 9th and 10th graders are all engaged in **a seminar on cultural competency** – exploring identity, bias, stereotype, privilege, the eight core identifiers, and ways to move our community forward. Thanks to the thoughtful advocacy of several students and Student Council, we now have two single-occupancy **all-gender restrooms** at BUA – a physical manifestation of the commitment to inclusion. And we have **deepened our strategic partnership with [Alexander Twilight Academy](#)**, an academic enrichment program for promising middle school students from under-resourced backgrounds in Boston; BUA students currently tutor ATA students weekly, and plans are in the works for some exciting BUA-ATA collaboration this summer – stay tuned!

Strong Signs in Admissions and Fundraising

I'm pleased to report that after a record number of applicants last year, early signs point to **another record year in admissions**. Compared to this point last year, interviews, preliminary applications, and attendance at admissions events are all significantly higher than last year's numbers. The word is out about this kind and curious community where students

have access to opportunities no other school can match. Thanks to Ms. Hakimi and our extraordinary admissions team, to our student tour guides, and to all of you for how you represent the school every day.

I also want to thank this community for its early and generous support of this year's [Annual Fund](#). To date, we have **raised 70% of our Annual Fund goal**, with six months to go before the close of the fiscal year. BUA's Annual Fund is – and will always be – about people. Those funds are what make it possible for us to extend financial aid to a third of our students and families; say yes when teachers ask for funds for professional learning and curriculum development; respond to crises like the pandemic; and seize opportunities like the mental health speaker and programs described above. That's why Tracey and I make the Annual Fund our family's philanthropic priority, and I'm grateful that so many of our families do the same.

Strategic Design Process

Thank you very much for participating in the community survey to inform our upcoming strategic design work. Later this winter and spring, I'll be working with a steering committee of faculty, staff, parents, and alumni to review that data and take the first steps toward a vision to guide BUA for the coming decade. I look forward to updating you on that work in the months ahead.

Staffing Updates

This semester, we welcome **Mr. Christian Gal, who will teach Dr. Formichelli's 11th grade English sections**. Mr. Gal has over 15 years of independent school teaching experience at Bancroft School and more recently at Pingree School. He has taught all levels and genres of high school English. He studied English as an undergraduate at Dartmouth and earned his master's in the field from Brown. Despite the circumstances, he is looking forward to getting to know our students. BUA's Dr. Alvarez will continue on with Dr. Formichelli's 9th grade English students, whom she has taught throughout the past several months. We are grateful to her, Mrs. Brown, Dr. Martinez, and Dr. Proll for their help in this difficult time.

Ms. Atkinson will be taking parental leave from February 7-April 29. Our beloved Ms. Evans, who has, for over twenty many years, been a central part of our college counseling team and has worked hand in glove with Ms. Atkinson, will be stepping into the Interim Director of College Counseling role for that period. We will also be **bringing on Ms. Jessica Jackson for those months as an Interim Assistant Director of College Counseling** to work alongside Ms. Evans. Ms. Jackson currently serves in a similar capacity at Milken Community School in Los Angeles. Before her time at Milken, Ms. Jackson served as an Assistant Dean of Admission at Claremont McKenna College. We feel fortunate to be able to bring in a seasoned professional with experience both in a top-tier secondary school and college.

Mr. Divac will be on sabbatical in the spring. I am proud to be at a school that prioritizes the professional growth of our teachers and has maintained the sabbatical tradition, where many other schools have moved away from that structure. Two of Mr. Divac's sections of MA95 will be taught by Dr. Karnaukh. Dr. Karnaukh currently teaches the junior STEM seminar and advises two sections of Senior Thesis students. Her PhD in chemistry focused on quantum chemistry, where she studied and regularly utilized multivariate calculus in her work. Mr. Ford, who has taught BUA's MA95 course several times over the course of his eight years in the BUA math department, will teach the other section and work closely with Dr. Karnaukh.

Finally, some hard news: **history teacher Dr. Villanueva has decided not to return to BUA in January.** She will be leaving for personal reasons, hoping to focus on her family and well-being. While Dr. Villanueva has only been with us a short time, she has had a tremendous impact on the students she has worked with and on our community. She asked that I pass along how much she has enjoyed teaching and advising her students at BUA and that she carries a deep admiration for these students, who, in her words, “have taught [her] so much” and “always found time to show [her] their passions and talents in the classroom that [she] otherwise would not have seen.” We wish Dr. Villanueva well and are very sorry to see her go. Rather than bringing in a teacher from the outside, we have decided that the best thing right now is to rely on teachers in our community. Two BUA history teachers will teach Dr. Villanueva’s American History sections: Ms. Emily Kamen, who currently teaches two sections of 9th grade history and whose undergraduate and graduate work at Princeton and Williams focused on American history; and Mrs. Brown, who teaches the other sections of American History. Dr. Davis, who has taught and shaped this course during most of his 20+ years at BUA, will teach Dr. Villanueva’s 10th grade history section. We know you’ll join us in wishing Dr. Villanueva well and thanking her for everything she has brought to our community.

This year, we have weathered more than our share of challenges. I am humbled by how this community has navigated difficult times, deeply grateful for all of you, and excited for the future we continue to build together.

Warm wishes for the new year,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Christopher Kolovos". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Christopher" and last name "Kolovos" clearly legible.

Chris Kolovos
Head of School