



# Buckingham Browne & Nichols School

October 10, 2008

Dear Members of BB&N's Alumni/ae Community:

Two decades have passed since BB&N was confronted with the revelation that one of our teachers had victimized students who were in his classes. Today we must confront and acknowledge that the school failed to respond to those awful events in an appropriate way, as they unfolded and in the intervening decades. With this letter, I offer a public apology on behalf of the School and the Board of Trustees. My sincere hope is that the School can begin a long-delayed process of healing for those adversely impacted by past events. In addition, I take this opportunity to renew our efforts to make BB&N a better and safer school, one committed to creating and sustaining an environment free of abusive conduct.

I will start with a review of the issues related to Edward Washburn, discuss a program to help those still suffering from events of that era, and outline a process to examine and enhance communication, policies, and procedures to make BB&N the safest possible environment for learning, teaching, and growing as individuals.

As many of you know, in February 1987 Washburn admitted to sexually inappropriate behavior with three BB&N students. The School promptly dismissed him. Soon thereafter, he was accused of raping his own nephew (not a BB&N student). He was prosecuted, pled guilty to raping his nephew, and received a suspended sentence which did not include incarceration. In 1988, the Headmaster admitted criminal wrongdoing for failing to report Washburn to the appropriate authorities in a timely manner and was fined.

On the public record, that ended the matter.

I write to acknowledge what many of you have expressed since then, and what I now believe to be true. BB&N did not undertake timely or effective efforts to determine whether Washburn victimized others. Consequently, we could not offer to those students the services essential to begin a healing process.

Sitting in my office in Renaissance Hall in 2008, I have the benefit of looking back at these events through a very different cultural lens. We know much more today than we did 20 years ago about the profile of child abusers. We know there is a pattern of power abuse and intimidation. In 2008, victims and their families are far less likely to be stigmatized or to fear public scrutiny. The fault is most emphatically not the victim's and the crime is one of violence. In 2008, students and parents are more likely to step forward and seek help from counselors and law enforcement. In 2008, there is consensus that dealing directly and candidly with acts of abuse may help ease the suffering of victims rather than make it worse. And in 2008, the law is crystal clear that institutions cannot acquiesce to requests that abuse cases be handled privately. As we know today, one result of the attitudes of old is to place an unfair burden on the victim, a burden of isolation, guilt, and shame.

I have spent considerable time over the past nine months learning more about what transpired during the Washburn era. I have concluded that we must now confront and admit our past mistakes with greater conviction than before. We must explain our failure to act until now. We must offer BB&N's sincere apology to those known and unknown victims of Washburn's terrible conduct. And we must make services available to address wounds that have not healed. Finally, we must resolve that such abuse will never happen again.

## **1. Acknowledgment of Past Mistakes**

One of the School's failures is, by now, well known: BB&N did not report Washburn's abuse to the Massachusetts Department of Social Services ("DSS"). Such "51A" reports are routinely filed today whenever there is a suspicion of child abuse. In 1987, the law was clear that BB&N had to report to DSS immediately if it had reasonable cause to believe that any child under age 18 suffered serious

physical or emotional injury resulting from sexual abuse. Had the School filed such a report, DSS may have been able to reach more affected students.

In addition, the School failed to reach out promptly *and effectively* to members of the BB&N community whom Washburn may have intimidated and abused. It was not until September 1987, well after an investigation by the District Attorney had begun, that the School reached out to the entire community with a letter encouraging people to help identify and assist any child who may have been affected.

By February 1987, members of the BB&N faculty and administration had already noted some troubling conduct by Washburn. For example, for a number of years, Washburn gave a sexually offensive “award” at the end of the year to a girl in his class. Upon learning about the award, School administrators told Washburn to stop but made no effort to contact the prior recipients of the award and inquire as to their well-being. School administrators also learned in the late 1970s that Washburn had taken BB&N students on trips to Squam Lake, and they had at least some indication that inappropriate activity, including swimming in the nude and sharing of sexually oriented magazines, took place there. Again, he was told to stop. Once again, however, there appears to have been no effort to investigate further and determine if any students were at risk or needed help.

## **2. Making Sense of What Happened**

As I have tried to make sense of what unfolded, I’m struck not only by the failure to ask more questions after these inappropriate activities first came to light but also by the atmosphere of silence and privacy at the School during the Washburn era.

My understanding is that some parents asked for complete privacy, out of a natural concern for their children’s well-being. The School did not appreciate, however, the negative consequences of containing the issues entirely within BB&N. Advisors to the School may have contributed to this inability to realize the possibility and extent of harm to victims.

There were other factors. The administration did not involve the faculty in its decision-making or in determining how best to help the School community. It also appears that the School’s judgment may have been clouded by a misplaced deference to Washburn, whom some saw as a gifted teacher and others viewed as intimidating. Against this backdrop, as I’ve noted, the School did not follow the statutory requirement to report Washburn’s abuse to DSS.

I have no way of knowing whether the School was motivated by a concern for its reputation or a prevailing attitude 20 years ago that sexual abuse should not be discussed openly. But it seems evident that all of these factors led to a course of action that did not address the needs of the known victims and ignored the victims who are unknown to this day.

Following the events of 1987, the School was reluctant to discuss the Washburn matter. In the late 1990s, Daniel Weinreb ’89 came forward and contacted BB&N. He reported that Washburn had abused him—we reveal no confidences here; he has said as much on his website—and advocated that the School take further action in connection with the Washburn matter. Nothing significant changed in the School’s posture. During this past year, I met and corresponded with Daniel and his sister as well as with other alumni/ae and Washburn victims. I credit Daniel and many others for their efforts to overcome my own reluctance and move the School toward a direct confrontation of its past shortcomings. I greatly appreciate their courage and persistence.

## **3. An Approach to Help Those Impacted**

BB&N’s Board of Trustees and I have resolved that our purpose now is to focus on healing and what the School can do to assist anyone adversely impacted by the events of the Washburn era, including both those whom he may have abused physically and those who still harbor emotional scars from the tumultuous events and uncomfortable silence that followed in the wake of his separation from the School.

With the assistance of legal and psychiatric experts and with the advice and consent of our Board of Trustees, I have created a procedure for offering counseling and treatment that can be accessed anonymously by any member of our alumni/ae community. A psychiatrist will be made available to any person who comes forward seeking assistance for emotional injury arising out of experiences relating to Ted Washburn. Any individual who contacts the dedicated line below will receive

consulting and referral services which will be completely anonymous to BB&N. The consulting psychiatrist will make recommendations to the School for any further therapy or treatment. The School will bear the cost of this consultation and treatment. We will not seek to obtain any information from this process other than the anonymous information necessary to provide necessary medical or psychiatric services.

To contact this service, call 617-558-3901, ask to speak with the consulting psychiatrist, and identify yourself as someone seeking assistance arising out of experiences relating to Ted Washburn.

#### **4. A Plan for the Future**

Much has changed in the last 20 years at BB&N. In 2008, there are counselors and nurses on each campus. Both the advisor system and the counseling system are much more proactive, structured, and connected than they were in the past. In the Middle School, there is an advisory curriculum in place that directly addresses the different inappropriate interactions that students might experience. Also in place at the Middle School are grade deans, a student support team that includes health professionals, and a plan for regular contact with parents in all grade levels. At the Lower School, we have a health curriculum in place that specifically deals with child-adult interactions and trains our youngest students with actions, language, and strategies around personal boundaries. On the Upper School campus there is a robust advising system. There are Class Deans and a Dean of Students and other support staff in place to hear grievances. A program in sexuality and relationships deals with some of the issues surrounding abuse, albeit indirectly. There is a noticeable increase in awareness surrounding the issue of sexual harassment since 1987, including regular, mandatory training on this topic for all faculty and staff. Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) checks are performed on all employees working at the School, both at hiring and subsequently at three-year intervals.

Many of you may know that, in the spring of 2008, we discovered that a former teacher during more recent years, Andrew Goldman, had been convicted of internet sex offenses. We carefully investigated the matter, contacted the appropriate authorities immediately, informed the BB&N community, and ultimately concluded that no BB&N student had been affected. I mention this for two reasons: first, to illustrate that the School has evolved considerably. BB&N has already taken affirmative steps to demonstrate a commitment toward complete transparency where issues of abuse or neglect arise. Second, the Goldman incident solidified my resolve to respond to the suggestions from Mr. Weinreb and others regarding the Washburn era.

I do not expect that the acknowledgements and apology contained in this letter will end the suffering of Washburn's victims or the misgivings of our alumni over the manner in which these affairs were managed. However, as we now set ourselves upon the right course, I do hope that all concerned will accept our commitment to ensure that similar tragedies never happen again. I would like to foster a safe environment where there is simply no place for intimidation, sexual harassment, inappropriate sexual behavior, or sexual abuse. Such a sense of safety requires a commitment to cultural values of communication, mutual respect, openness, tolerance, and participation. Toward that end, I have decided to take concrete steps to ensure that BB&N is a model for dealing with any and all potential abuse situations in the future.

I plan on tasking a group of faculty—including current faculty as well as faculty from the Washburn era—to advise me on specific changes that can be made internally to ensure optimal communication and openness between faculty and administration in reporting and responding to potential abuse. I am going to reach out to the Student Council and task them with recommendations for improving and enhancing communication channels between students, their advisors, and the administration. I am going to enlist the assistance of a third-party provider to create a confidential hotline for any member of our community who wishes to report a case of abuse or neglect. I am also considering a symposium across numerous disciplines to carefully explore other steps that might be appropriate to help our community.

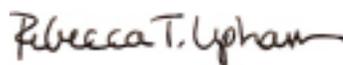
Finally, I admire the tenacity, courage, and commitment shown by Daniel Weinreb '89 during the past ten years. Despite numerous formidable impediments, including the School's unwillingness to assist him in reaching out to potential victims, he has persevered. I want to apologize to him on behalf of myself and the School for the obstacles he encountered. He recently launched a website which has raised consciousness and helped many members of our community in starting the difficult process of healing from the Washburn era. I similarly credit the courage of those who have posted testimonials on his website, many of which reflect a dark and at times malicious portrait of their Middle School teacher, Ted Washburn.

As difficult as this journey has been for BB&N, I know that it has been many more times difficult for those students whose abuse by Washburn has gone unaddressed. If you are one of those students, please know that I am sorry. I hope you will accept this apology and offer of services. If you know one of those students, please convey this apology and opportunity for help to him or her.

I expect that we will be about this for some time, and that our sincere attempt to foster a healing process will benefit all of the BB&N community. I ask of us all what many have already asked of their School: that we collectively acknowledge the terrible acts of Ted Washburn and that we reach out to those who may have been affected by his actions.

Let us begin today to make BB&N the safest possible experience and environment for all our students—past, present, and future.

Sincerely yours,

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