



From the Office of the Headmaster

Tuscaloosa Academy

Think. Play. Belong.

I cannot thank the TA community enough for embracing me and my family. This was a critical year for TA and for the Mitchells. We are so appreciative of the graciousness and good will bestowed upon us as we have made our home in Tuscaloosa and we look forward to many more years. As I have said to many in the TA community, my simple and straight-forward goal is to lead TA to the next level as an elite independent school. To this end, a lot was achieved in this first year.

We needed a new schedule that would put us in the same league as elite independent schools in the country, and we now have it. We have extended our period length, thus reducing transition times during the day. We have rotated our periods so that quality instructional time is distributed evenly among the classes. Most important, we will start athletic practices after the school day ends which will provide us with an additional 250 minutes of instructional time weekly, putting us on par with the average for independent schools around the nation. All of this was done by extending the school day by only 10 minutes.

We tweaked our pre-school admissions process to allow a mid-year intake for suitable students. We've established a summer program that provides the finest array of offerings in the Tuscaloosa area. We adjusted our dress code policy to one that is more befitting of a college preparatory school. In essence we have eliminated the wearing of t-shirts, except on casual Fridays. We made significant changes to our maintenance program and personnel, which has had a significant impact on the cleanliness and state of repair of the facility, not to mention our bottom line. We gave new life to the TA Parent Association, inviting them to support academically related initiatives in all divisions. An off-shoot of this was the establishment of Parent Councils at each division level and Headmaster Coffees. Similarly, we established a Parent Ambassadors program which has a number of parents working directly with the Headmaster and Admissions, enabling our enrollment, marketing and communications efforts. Finally, we worked out with MBUSI (Mercedes) the re-implementation of their policy to pay tuition for some of their employees. We expect from this to have an influx of students. We believe the renewal of this plan will result in an influx of students, an exciting prospect, and we look forward to continuing the mutually beneficial relationship that TA has historically enjoyed with MBUSI.

For next year we've already committed to hiring teaching assistants in the Lower School which will allow us to provide a brand of individual attention unmatched in Tuscaloosa County and perhaps in Alabama. Rene McNeal will be a Middle School resource person working with students who need remediation or enrichment in math or language arts. We have hired Dr. John Ratliff to coordinate our Upper School TA Scholars Program, which offers a rigorous and college-like academic experience for students who are ready to meet the challenge. It is also TA's time for our 5-year accreditation through SACS and SAIS. Obviously this is a critical process, and my plan is to include as many in the TA community as possible.

In addition to Rene McNeal as Middle Resource teacher, Dr. Ratliff as TA Scholars coordinator and teaching assistants in the Lower School, we will also make the following personnel moves: Mrs. Whiteside will assume the role of Academic Dean, in addition to her role as Middle School Dean. In this

role, she will oversee all major curriculum initiatives and the TA *Professional Learning Community*, which includes professional development and teacher evaluation. She will also write grants to major foundations. Joan Robards will become the school counselor, heading-up both guidance and college counseling for the entire school. Mr. von Redlich will teach drama to some Middle School students. Mrs. Kohl will teach an AP Government course, Mrs. Ouderkirk will teach an AP Chemistry course and I will teach an AP Psychology course. We may also establish a “strings program” in which we provide formal instruction to students on the violin, viola, cello and bass. We will work on the feasibility of the latter option early this summer.

Finally, I want to publicly thank the TA Board of Directors, and specifically the Executive Committee with Hunter Plott as Chairman. They entrusted me as guardian of their school. In many cases, it is the school they went to as students, so TA is in their heart and soul. As Hunter stated one time, “There are no other options for me and my family.” Their support of the school and me has been invaluable and together we are providing the education our children deserve.

Please, have a restful and enjoyable summer.

Sincerely,

Jeff