



From the Office of the Headmaster

Tuscaloosa Academy

Think. Play. Belong.

Why BELONG.

Belong means individual attention; not getting lost in the shuffle...not slipping through the cracks...feeling you are an integral part of something...

To belong you must feel safe. At TA students and parents often comment on the physical and emotional safety they feel. To belong is to feel you have the freedom to do what's right. For example, we have a mandatory drug testing program grades 7-12 (and for faculty) allowing us to unequivocally state we do not have drugs at TA, and to provide students with an iron clad rationale if they get pressured by their peers to try drugs.

Belong also relates to the idea of individual attention. Parents at TA value small classes which lead to their child being "known." Surveys of parents inevitably indicate that a primary reason for attending independent schools is this notion of individual attention. Similarly, I conduct yearly exit interviews with seniors. This year, all of the seniors indicated something akin to *individual attention* in response to a question in which I asked them about the strengths of TA.

Finally, feeling one truly *belongs* relates to what has been called the *hidden curriculum*. The hidden curriculum is everything that happens outside of formal instruction during the school day. When you think about it that's a lot. What happens when students walk down the hall, go out for recess, or go to the restroom? What's the implicit, as opposed to the explicit, message at the school? It's like non-verbal behavior or reading between the lines: so much meaning can be added to a circumstance. At TA we're proud of our formal curriculum but we're equally proud of the intangibles represented by the *hidden curriculum*.

The pride we all share in our school is apparent and it stems from knowing that there is a place for all at TA.