

September 2016

Dear Members of the BUSD Board,

Greetings on behalf of BALSAs! I hope this letter finds you rested, rejuvenated, and ready to embark on another successful school year.

As we transition into fall, I would like to take a moment to share some of the progress we have made towards supporting advanced learners in BUSD over the past two years. In partnership with Superintendent Donald Evans, and Director of Programs and Special Projects Pat Saddler, we've launched a new after-school program focusing on talent development (APEX), piloted an exciting new STEAM initiative with potential regional significance (Curved Blackboard), and taken concrete steps towards closing the opportunity gap that continues to create educational disparities in our community.

In addition to collaborating on the above, BALSAs has also been hard at work in the three areas identified in our mission statement: support, advocacy, and community.

Here are highlights of some of our accomplishments in 2015-16:

- **Raised \$30,000.00 to support BUSD programs** through grant-writing initiatives
- **Expanded outreach to underrepresented families** by collaborating with the Office of Family Engagement and Equity, PCAD, representatives from the Spanish-speaking community, and BUSD administrators
- **Recruited highly-qualified teachers and instructional assistants from underrepresented demographic groups** to lead Curved Blackboard classes
- **Hosted (with PCAD, BSPED, and others) a highly-successful parent affinity group summit**, to explore common ground and address divisions in the broader BUSD community
- **Organized the first APEX/Curved Blackboard Open House**, showcasing the work of students in the program, and celebrating the completion of a successful first year
- **Supported parent/staff education** through our popular guest-speaker series

- **Purchased books to create a BALSAs lending library**, available to parents and staff
- **Surveyed our membership** to determine level of satisfaction and priorities

Moving forward, we have identified three new areas in which we hope to make progress this year (2016-17):

1. **Professional Development in differentiation** (still identified as the number one priority for a majority of BALSAs members)
2. **Plan for universal GATE screening and identification** at the elementary level
3. **Improved communication systems**
 - BUSD webpage addressing opportunities for advanced learners
 - Link to BALSAs website from BUSD page
 - District contact for consistently disseminating BALSAs announcements (and those of other district-approved groups) to all BUSD sites

Please let us know how BALSAs can support the Board's vision in these three areas.

We at BALSAs remain united in our belief that by partnering with the District, Board, and other parent groups, we can build bridges within the larger BUSD community to make our learning communities stronger. **When members of BALSAs, PCAD, BSPED and other BUSD affinity groups came together for a summit last spring, for example, we discovered that we all wanted the same thing: high expectations for *all* students; truly differentiated instruction; measurable academic growth for every learner, every year; and a focus on the whole child.** These discoveries proved what we already suspected: we need not be a divided community, fighting over different slices of the pie, but rather can grow into a single, complex BUSD family—rich in its diversity, passionate about learning, and creative in its engagement with the larger world. This is the BUSD we all want to nurture.

On behalf of BALSAs, I look forward to hearing your thoughts and plans about the upcoming year, and offer an ongoing pledge to continue our work together in the months to come.

Sincerely,

Rachel Hurwitz
 Founder and President of BALSAs; King/BHS parent