

President Comments:

As we draw to the close of the 2014-15 School Year, I'm amazed by how much our kids and community have grown over the past year. I'm writing this, just after having seen so many of our wonderful students receive Presidential Excellence Awards, and I'm grateful to say that I knew almost all of the kids receiving the awards, and felt great pride for each and every one of them. It gave me pause for reflection on the wisdom, strength and beauty that has been imparted to our kids this past year.

This time last year, we were headed into the proverbial unknown; a new neighborhood, a new (to us) campus that needed so much work, new leadership at the helm, and the promise of a "forever home" in the East Village that had yet to break ground. We were, to say the least, in flux and at the mercy of the fates.

Each family had a decision to make, cut and run, or put our faith in the leadership of the school, the ability of our stellar teachers, and roll up our sleeves to make our tenuous situation work. For most of us it was an easy decision to make; we believed in the harmony of the UDA community; the teachers, the administration, the BoT, and most of all, our kids ability to embrace change as a positive and grow from the experience. So many families stepped forward over the weeks before school opened, broke out their shovels, brooms, tools and paint brushes and put a new face on our little campus so our kids would have a great environment to further their learning. We worked side-by-side with teachers and admin and readied our campus for the new school year.

When school opened in September, I reveled in the delight of our students as they strode wide-eyed on to the campus that first day. It was clear to me that it mattered not to the kids where they went to learn, just so long as they had their community. And thus began yet another amazing year in the storied history of UDA.

We knew this was going to be a temporary home, but over the course of the year, many parents worked to maintain the aesthetics of the grounds. Even just a couple weeks ago I spoke with Denny Sharp as he wiped the sweat from his brow while planted flowers and shrubs, knowing full-well, we'd be vacating the premises soon. The message, as subtle as it might be, is to leave a place better than you found it, and I trust that message won't be lost on our kids.

Over the course of the year I've have had to privilege to work side-by-side with some amazing people in The UDA Parent Network. A few, whose elected terms are coming to an end, are stepping aside to make room for new parents to fill their roles. These are parents who have volunteered countless hours in the classroom, putting on events, organizing food, and rolling up their sleeves to do whatever it takes over the years--yes, years--with very little recognition.

On one hand, I'm sad to see them go, because I know what they are capable of, what they can accomplish, and their passion for supporting not just their kids, but all of

UDA. On the other, I'm excited to work with the new UDA Parent Network volunteers to see what amazing things we will accomplish as we move into our new "forever home" in the East Village. And I think it pertinent to take a moment to thank each and every member of the team for the time they've sacrificed to make UDA a better place for all our kids.

First, though, I'd like to take a moment to say thank you to the Board of Trustees for working tirelessly to not only govern the vision of UDA, but secure and build the future edifice that will henceforth be known as Urban Discovery Academy. This new home wouldn't be possible without the vision of our Board of Trustees, and the overwhelming determination and perseverance of MaeLin Levine, who would stop at nothing to see our new campus erected. As the dust of the construction settles at the beginning of next year, I look forward to seeing the systems they put in place drive the future and vision of our school.

Secondly, I'd like to thank the Administration of UDA. This year has seen tremendous growth in the systems that operate UDA and without such a hardworking, dynamic team of people, I don't know that our school would have enjoyed the success it has enjoyed this year. Dr. Taylor came in to a very fluid environment, and the families of UDA have been incredibly impressed with the leadership, commitment, and dedication to the overall success of the school. Recognizing that a great team requires great leadership; it is testament to the abilities of those that make the school move and grow.

As for the UDA Parent Network, I lament the end of Jen Jeffress' two years as Vice President and her previous years of Network service. Jen is a fixture at the school stepping in where-ever and when-ever help is needed. I know she's looking forward to devoting more time in the classrooms of her kids and increasing her professional work load, but she has truly been a driver behind every initiative, every event, every opportunity to improve, and every opportunity to grow this school. I have been so tremendously grateful for her continual support. Jen has endured the frustration of managing me and keeping me on point--no easy task, something akin to herding cats. I will miss her emails, calls and texts, and I want to thank her family for loaning her and her amazing mind to me and the school for the year(s).

A shout out to Sara Glick for organizing our coffee socials, Frozen Friday's and restaurant fundraisers. She has also dedicated a number of years to the UDA Parent Network in various capacities. Sara gets stuff done. no other way to put it. On top of the UDA Parent Network, she has been active within the classroom and Girl Scouts, all while beginning a new career this year. So many of our fund-raisers have enjoyed success because of her amazing ability to set her jaw to the wind and Get. It. Done!

We all know Erika Fox. She has been the communication hub of the Parent Network for a few years. She's been the one to update the Parent Portal on the UDA website, organize mass communications, organize our volunteers, communicate with teachers

and interface with Class Parents. Additionally, she has tirelessly volunteered to be at the front of nearly every event making sure everything runs smoothly. When the call goes out for bodies needed to work an event, Erika is always there.

Kris Lang has been at the forefront of so many events UDA has put on for years. Years. Yes, years. She has been the face of Fall Festival for longer than my family has been at UDA. Those food trucks that started appearing at our events, including Performing Arts Nights? Kris Lang. And when Ellen had to step down after taking a seat on the BoT, Kris stepped in as the interim Middle School Liaison. Her creativity and ability to think outside the box has been such a great asset to the success of our large events. Her presence at the table will be missed, for she has lit a torch that shines ever so brightly.

Art Festival this year was an incredibly huge success, and at the helm was Shoshana Jarman, whose bright smile and beaming personality drove the event to new creative heights. I had so much fun working with Shoshana this year, because you could literally see when a new idea popped into life within her magnificent brain. Those ideas took on a life of their own and she drove the event to be something that I don't think any of us expected, and left me wondering, "what's next?" Her family is such a great addition to UDA, and I look forward to the years ahead.

Another person that will be missed on The UDA Parent Network next year is Dolores Totman. She has given so much of what little time she has available to the school. As our Secretary this year, she was diligent in her note-taking and dissemination of our Minutes. Knowing I have a tendency to ramble (if you're still reading this, you get it), she was the one to put me back on task. She has worked so hard and so quietly, behind the scenes in a support role that few see and fewer recognize the importance of. We all wish her great success as she pursues new professional interests and dedicates her limited free-time to her sons classroom. Additionally I will miss adjourning a meeting at 8:02 and receiving the Minutes, fully edited, at 8:24.

Carrie Gunn, Allison Priola, and Mary Parra were originally slated to organize the UDA Gala for the year. And after spending months working to that end, graciously and seamlessly transitioned from that to helping organize and facilitate our extremely successful Shout It Out event. Without the massive amount of time they put in leading up to the event, and the dozen or so hours Carrie and Allison spent working the day of the event, Shout It Out wouldn't have been the success it was. I've had the pleasure of knowing these terrific individuals for a few years now, and I am truly blessed to have had them volunteer this year.

Sarah Goehring has been another individual that has worked this year to bring us Mixed Bags, Stickers, Hats, Water Bottles, has continued the tradition Kris brought to us with roller skating, and has been at the cash register for so many of our events. She has filled-in where needed, offered sage council, and has been laying the foundation for her role next year as Cat Wrangler--er--Vice President of the UDA

Parent Network for next year. It's been such a pleasure working with such a mindful, dynamic individual, and I really look forward to working with my friend, Sarah, next year.

Our Treasurer and Bean Counter Extraordinaire has been Lisa Ryan. Along with me, she will be continuing on next year to finish her two-year term. She managed the financial transition this year as the structure of the Parent Network changed to accommodate the needs of the BoT in building a separate fundraising foundation. Our events still required seed money, and her ability to help build systems with the school to manage the finances and fundraising efforts as we transitioned was critical to the success of those efforts. Always smiling, and ever-present, she's been great council when needed and stalwart in her unfettered support of UDA.

Finally, I speak for the parents, when I offer up my deepest gratitude to all of the teachers of UDA. As parents, we entrust you with our our kids, and you do not disappoint. We have the cream of the crop when it comes to teachers.

Personally, I'm dazzled by your ability to engage our kids, drive their thirst for knowledge, and maintain the energy and affability you embody. I've come to know several teachers at UDA who've served on the UDA Parent Network or have been engaged in educating my daughter, and I have to say that I respect and admire each and every one of you. You do a difficult job, and to the last of you, you do it so incredibly well.

To every facet of Urban Discovery Academy--the BoT, the UDA Foundation, Administration, Teachers, Support Staff, family/parent volunteers, and the UDA Parent Network-- I think I speak for all the parents within our community when I say thank you for bringing wisdom, strength, and beauty to our children's lives, for those are pillars upon which we achieve harmony. Harmony being the strength and support of all societies.

Respectfully,
Jay Sener