

CELEBRATING  
**25**  
YEARS



Urban  
ACADEMY

# ROAR

NOVEMBER 2025

## A LEGACY BUILT TOGETHER

Knox Presbyterian Church (2001–2006)

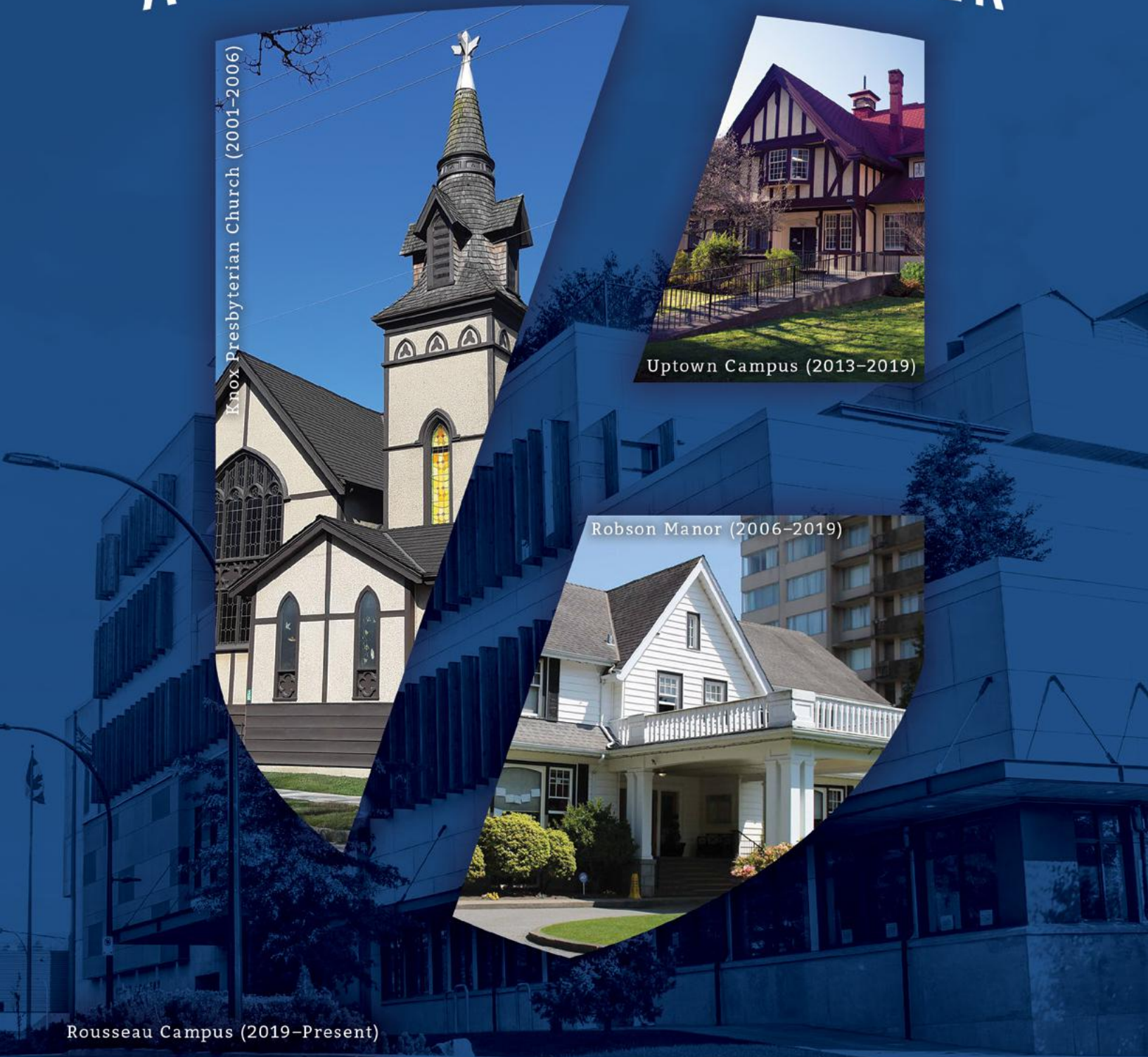


Uptown Campus (2013–2019)

Robson Manor (2006–2019)



Rousseau Campus (2019–Present)









# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This edition of the UA Roar Magazine has taken me on a journey. Meeting with the founders this summer, their story instantly transported me back to the Drummond's living room in the spring of 2001. It was there that a partnership between the Drummond and Tays Clarke families was formed, and the Urban Academy seed was planted. You will read that that seed grew quickly and years of their hard work, passion for the school, and sacrifice ensued.

But the commitment didn't end there; it was taken up by key families and volunteers, like Deborah McKenzie and Abi Johnston, and many more, who were integral in ensuring the school set a strong foundation with an eye toward the future. Again, their years of dedication, sacrifice, and vision will become evident as you read about their journeys.

As part of sharing the UA story, I dug through digital files as well as boxes of newspaper clippings and photos unearthed from our vault. As I read articles and sifted through albums, then searched through our present day photos, it became crystal clear that the founders' vision for Urban Academy is alive and well today. There were and are photos upon photos, from the past and present, of students doing incredible things. But they were never alone—the community of staff and families surrounded them every step of the way.

The balance of the UA Roar is a testament to just that: stories about students doing amazing things, supported by the staff and families who are part of a community that allows students to be known, stretched, and future-ready changemakers in their communities.

I was fortunate to join Urban Academy nearly 14 years ago, taking on a role previously held by founder Laura Drummond. I'll leave you to read the rest of this publication, but I hope her words—shared with me those many years ago—stay with you as you do. Standing in the Robson Manor kitchen, a cup of coffee in her hands, she looked at me and said, *"I may not change the world, but I just might be able to impact one student who will go on to change the world."* Well Laura, Brian, Donna, and Glen, I can absolutely say that your legacy changed the lives of countless students and families, a dream that every staff member continues to pursue as they walk through Urban Academy's doors today.



Happy Reading!  
**MS. SONJA KENNEDY / Editor**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 3** Letter from the Editor
- 4** The Founders' Vision: Urban Academy's Beginnings
- 8** Building a Legacy: Key Volunteers Who Lead
- 10** Charting Our Course: The Future of UA
- 11** Moments That Matter: Reflections from the UA Teaching Team
- 12** Building a Zoo from Scratch... In Grade 3?
- 13** The Power of Early Intervention
- 14** Growing Up, Gaining Independence: The Middle School Journey
- 16** Unleashing Potential: Leadership and Service at Urban Academy
- 18** From ABC's to AI: Defining the New Era of K-12 Learning
- 20** Lights, Camera, Action!
- 22** The Unwritten Curriculum: The Power of Student Life
- 24** A Journey North: Grade 8 & 9 Students Experience the Yukon
- 25** Exploring the Iberian Peninsula: Grade 10–12 Students In Portugal and Spain
- 26** Unlocking Potential: The Duke of Edinburgh's Award at Urban Academy
- 27** What is Inquiry, and Why Does It Matter?
- 28** Urban Academy Class of 2025
- 29** AP at UA: Academic Rigour Meets Real-World Readiness
- 30** A Counsellor's Perspective: Challenges Children & Youth Face Today
- 32** Roaring in the Den: Athletics Hits an All-Time High
- 34** Ask Me Anything: The UA Lion Speaks

## ANNUAL REPORT

- 36** Board Chair Report
- 37** Head of School Report
- 38** Student Achievement: UA Students Explored, Engaged & Excelled
- 40** Treasurer Report
- 41** Governance & Risk Committee Report
- 41** Board Development Report
- 42** Facilities Report
- 44** Community Advancement Report

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## THE FOUNDERS' VISION: URBAN ACADEMY'S BEGINNINGS

**MS. SONJA KENNEDY** / Director of Development

On the 25th anniversary of Urban Academy, its founders—Donna Tays, Brian and Laura Drummond—gathered overlooking the Fraser River in the New Westminster Boathouse to reminisce and share stories of the school's beginning. Amidst laughter and a few tears, they sifted through a binder of old newspaper clippings and photos, and reflected on their journey of building a school from the ground up. It is a story they described as involving “a lot of manual labour, a church basement, countless late nights and a dream.”

The journey began when Brian and Laura Drummond's son, Aidan, the oldest of their three children, was nearing school age. Uninspired by the public school system, they started researching and found that their friends' children at private schools in Vancouver were learning the arts, music, languages, and so many other things that were missing from the local options.

Donna Tays recalled her own experience as a young teacher: “I was young, keen and trying new things in the classroom, but was told not to rock the boat. I said to myself, ‘honest to goodness, there's such a better way to teach children than what we were doing as standard practice.’” So with the desire to see her own two kids (who were still a bit younger than school age) not just survive, but thrive, she started to think about what might be possible.

The Drummonds had recently met Donna Tays and her husband, Glen Clarke, at a personal development course. One evening, the Drummonds filled their living room with friends who had young children, and Donna was on that invite list. That fateful evening, they welcomed a teacher who they had heard was doing wonderful things in Vancouver, to share what she was up to,



First class





hoping to bring to New Westminster. Though that plan never materialized, the seed was planted. Brian remembers thinking, "All we need is a teacher and a space, so why don't we do this ourselves?" It turned out that all three founders shared a vision for a place with a strong focus on arts, music, drama, and French from the earliest grades, a place where the curriculum would be rich and the children would be inspired.

So the Drummonds, Tays Clarkes, and one other family, the Prahsts, set out with an idea. The initial plan was simple, almost comically so. "We just thought, 'all we need is a teacher and a space, don't we?'" Donna laughed. "It was like, let's paint the chalkboards and put up a school." They discovered that a building where they could legally start a school without too much red tape would be a church. Thus, Urban Academy was born in a rented space at Knox Presbyterian Church.

After leasing the space, they still needed a teacher. They held open houses to attract students, speaking with confidence that the right teacher would come. As one did in 2001, they put an ad in the paper and found their first teacher from Calgary. She wasn't the only one to see that ad. Retired principal June Harrison was also intrigued by a new school in the neighbourhood and picked up the phone. Laura shared, "We had some meetings with June, and I think she just kind of got reinvigorated about school and the process of teaching. She came on board, adding credibility to what we were doing." So, it began in one rented room with a teacher, a mentor in Ms. Harrison, some freshly painted chalkboards, and ten students by the end of that first September.

The early years were a mix of backbreaking labour and joyful chaos. Donna described it as "all of that kind of messiness... it was the authentic human bond that we needed; the glue to keep enough people together." The founders served as janitors, lunch supervisors, and maintenance crew. Laura recounted a vivid memory. "One of us would have to show up at lunchtime and take the kids across to the park so that the teacher could have a lunch break," adding wide-eyed, "we would bring equipment to clear needles from the park before the kids could play."



MARIO BARTEL/NEWSLEADER

Laura Drummond, president of the new Urban Academy private school, hangs the sign outside their new home at Knox Presbyterian Church in Sapperton. Looking on is the school's board of directors, Glen Clarke, Donna Clarke, Brian Drummond and Indira Prahst.

## New private school to focus on students' abilities

BY DAVID ALLAN WEIR  
NEWSLEADER STAFF

Brian Drummond never expected to be running his own school.

But Drummond, along with his wife, Laura, and three others make up the first board of directors of the Urban Academy, a private school set to open this September in New Westminster.

"We always talked as [our son] was growing up that we wanted some options outside the public school system so that he would get a little more individual attention and maybe focus

on taking more time with the skills that he doesn't have as opposed to being flung in with a crowd of 20 to 25 kids," Drummond said.

Urban Academy's roots trace back to an informal gathering at the Drummonds' house about five months ago. Several families came together and tossed around ideas about what they wanted in a school.

Those ideas were left to simmer until two months ago when the Drummonds, along with Glen and Donna Clarke and Indira Prahst de-

• CONTINUED PG. 14 - SEE SCHOOL





The name itself, Urban Academy, was a compromise from their initial idea of 'Urban Renaissance Academy,' which they thought was 'too flighty.' However, Brian noted that the spirit of the Renaissance through the UA program lives on.

One of the most significant challenges was accreditation and funding. After being in operation for a full school year without government funding and pouring in their own money to keep the school afloat, they finally received their first check in January 2003. The funds came a full 18 months after opening the doors to Urban Academy. However, it was even more than 18 months prior that the founders had been investing in personnel, equipment and leases. This was an incredible struggle for them that they raised with the Ministry inspectors. Those inspectors were so impressed by their commitment, but realized the funding system in its current form and timing was unsustainable for new schools. The founders' fiscal responsibility and compelling initiative helped change the provincial funding system to provide earlier payments for future startup schools. This is a fact they are very proud of and has since allowed for countless start-up schools to experience success.

Facing growing pains from sharing space in a rented church, they planned for expansion. In 2006, they purchased Robson Manor in Queens Park. The historic building, which had previously been an event venue, was financed through a Parent Equity Program where early families took a risk to help UA grow, along with support from a generous lender. Donna recalled, "We cleaned, fixed things, assembled furniture, built the playground, we just did everything." She spent so much time in the beautiful historic gardens that people would mistake her for a hired staff member. Donna and Brian were all in, "We were the funders, the work crew,

the staff when necessary. It was us, just doing what needed to be done."

Because of their deep involvement, Brian and Laura moved a number of times to be closer to the school. Brian remembered, "The number of times the alarm would go off in the middle of the night, and I would show up with a baseball bat, wandering the dark halls of the manor. It was constant." Donna's career in real estate and the Drummonds' careers as actors allowed them to be flexible with their time. They were also fully invested and ensured that the arts were a core component of the school from the start. Laura explained, "Confidence, creativity and community were such a big part of it, the emotional aspect of what we did. We wanted our kids to be able to go out into the world and feel confident enough to do anything they chose." To this day, the arts remain a valued component of the UA education, only enhanced by the growth in athletics, STEM, and extracurriculars—a true Renaissance education.

The adventure continued as UA was often approached by international agents. It was clear that enrolling International Students would help further grow the school in those early years. But again, with a personal effort by the founders, both the Drummonds and the Tays Clarkes took on hosting international students, up to three at a time each, in order to make it work. For the Drummonds, that meant 6 kids getting ready in the morning. At Knox, they could all walk to school, but Brian still did the morning pick up in their van for other students who needed to get to school. Donna, who innately thrives in building relationships, shared that "We still keep in touch with all of the students we have had. I've met them and some of their families, it's really wonderful to keep that going."

UA opens with  
1 teacher  
& 10 students

**2001**

100 students

**2006**

UA moves to  
Robson Manor

**2009**

**2013**

Uptown  
campus opens  
(Gr. 4–12)

UA moves to 466  
Rousseau with  
269 students

**2019**

**2022**

4th & 5th floor  
expansion opens





It turned out that the heaviest part of the load was not filling spaces and teachers, or even welcoming international students into their homes, but rather the administration of a school. With an open mind and desire to learn themselves, they undertook what some may have viewed as the impossible. Starting up a school from scratch included meeting significant Ministry of Education requirements, developing systems for student files, creating handbooks, building an admissions department, while also meeting non-profit status requirements with a board and all that that entails. To stay deeply rooted in community, they also ensured there were opportunities for families to connect. They started a beloved Mother's Day Tea tradition and the Back To School BBQ, an event that still takes place today, but instead of Brian and Glen flipping burgers, we now have food trucks! For the founding families, it turned out that handing out pencils and welcoming students, while important, was only part of the work.

The project came at a price. Laura reflected, "Now, when we look back on that time of our lives, I don't know how we did it. There were so many meetings, we were staying up to two in the morning doing paperwork, like it was insane, there were a lot of babysitters." Still, she affirmed, "As crazy as the first couple of years were, it was still so very fun and very rewarding because of the people we met along the way and the success the school was experiencing."

So now, looking at today, what are their thoughts about what the school is now? They were asked about Urban Academy's current mission—**connected through learning, inspired by community, empowered to contribute**—and its core values. Before even being able to finish that last and oh so important value of the *entrepreneurial spirit*, the founders beamed. Brian leaned back in his chair, put his hands on his head, smiling, "You know, you

could have put those words in front of us 25 years ago, and we would have chosen exactly the same wording." Donna nodded, "Yes. Absolutely, that feels so right."

Although the path was challenging and sometimes rocky, there are tendrils, likely more than tendrils, powerful chains anchoring our community of today into the purpose and reason Urban Academy started all those years ago in the hearts of our founders.

While it was a true but heavy labour of love, there are so many people today who are grateful for their vision, passion and personal investments they and their families made in those early years. The hard work, the late nights, the messy moments—all of it created a place where kids feel empowered to belong and stretched to become their authentic selves. To the founders, from all of us who have followed and benefited from this place, we say a heartfelt "thank you."

AP courses added  
to Senior School

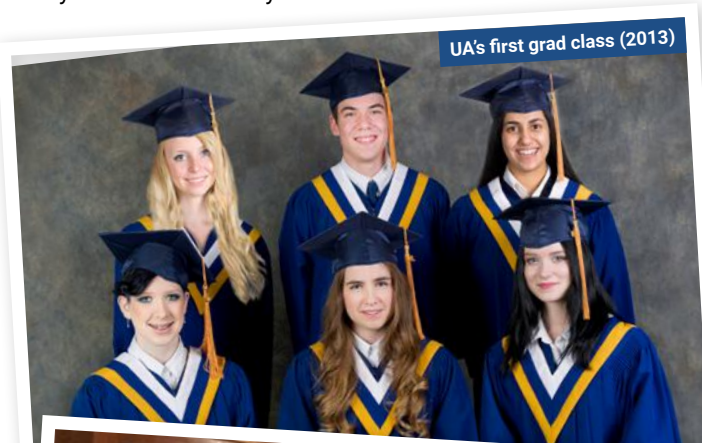
Duke of Ed  
program launches  
8 445 students

2023

2024

2025

Rousseau House opens



UA's first grad class (2013)



Winter concerts have always been at the heart of UA



Parent meeting, planning for the future



Full school camping trips were a beloved tradition



Donna Tays at the first Gala, "Through the Wardrobe"





## BUILDING A LEGACY: KEY VOLUNTEERS WHO LEAD

Deborah McKenzie

Abi Johnston



Deborah McKenzie with Cheryle Beaumont celebrating the opening of the Cheryle Beaumont Theatre

### MS. SONJA KENNEDY / Director of Development

For many parents across BC, a child's school is where we drop them off and pick them up. But for some, it becomes something more: a project, a calling and a community they help build from the ground up. Urban Academy, as many families know it today, is a testament to decades of dedication—not just from the founding families but also from key volunteer or “builder” parents. First there was **Deborah McKenzie** and a decade later, **Abi Johnston**, two parents who played remarkable roles in shaping the school's journey, taking it from a small rental space to the thriving organization it is today. Their intertwined stories of tireless effort, unwavering belief and a willingness to step outside their comfort zones offer a powerful lesson in what it means to be part of this community.

Deborah and Abi were drawn to the school for similar reasons: they found a place that genuinely understood and nurtured their children. For Deborah, in 2003 it was the beautiful opening circle she witnessed for her daughter, Paisley, which “captured everybody's heart.” For Abi, it was the strong sense of community and individual attention a smaller school could provide that shifted something in her. That sense of belonging and academic care was the spark that ignited their commitment.

They both quickly realized that UA's magic was a direct result of parent effort. It wasn't long before both stepped into action. Deborah, driven by a desire to protect her children's education and ensure it aligned with her family's values, found herself on the Education then Development Committees and ultimately landing on the board. When Abi joined UA in 2012, she dove headfirst into fundraising, stepping into a PAX role then pioneering the first silent auction at the Gala, an ongoing asset to our major events today. Then when asked by Deborah, Abi stepped onto the board. Their paths mirrored one another, about a decade apart.

### Building from the Ground Up

The school's history is a story of audacious goals and the heavy lifting required to achieve them. Both Deborah and Abi were at the heart of the pivotal moments.

Deborah, involved in the development and real estate world, saw the potential for growth both in student size and facility. She, along with about 26 passionate families, supported the concept of a Parent Equity program (then \$25,000 per child) which she calls a “saving grace,” to fund the school's first major building purchase, Robson Manor. She recalled a time when banks wouldn't look at a five-year-old non-profit school, leading her to secure the first mortgage from a personal friend. This was an overwhelming period, a time of sacrifice and sleepless nights. But as Deborah reflected, “Our first child was thriving at UA, our next child would be starting soon, and the school needed all parents to help. I had skills and connections that would be useful, so I stepped up to help.”

As Deborah's tenure on the board progressed, she became Board Chair, a role she had no previous experience with but a role she was determined to learn. Deborah enrolled in a course for newly appointed Board Chairs at Vantage Point, a not-for-profit education centre. It was there that she had the fortuitous meeting with one of the training program volunteers, Cheryle Beaumont, who later went on to become the UA Head of School and was a pivotal leader in the purchase and building of our facility today at 466 Rousseau.

With this training, Deborah took on the challenge of evolving the board from an operational to a strategic one, securing financing for new properties, and hiring a new Head of School. She was driven by a deep respect for the founders' vision, stating, “What was important for me was the strong values and community connections that the founders had started. I remained focused on ensuring the founders' dreams remained intact as the school grew and matured.”





Elizabeth Fletcher, Sonja Kennedy, Abi Johnston, Suzanne McLeod & Deborah McKenzie

Abi, a physician by profession, echoed this commitment to the school's bigger picture. After years of running the Gala auction, she was approached by Deborah to consider joining the board. Though not a position she had seen for herself and outside her skill set, it was an opportunity to really contribute to the fabric of the school. And, like Deborah shared, "You did what you needed to do." This willingness to take on new challenges for the school's benefit was a recurring theme. Abi eventually became Board Chair herself, leading the board through the COVID pandemic, the expansion into the Rousseau Campus and the hiring of a new Head of School. She described the challenges of this period, but also the immense pride in what they accomplished. "We were a group of parents who had such a lofty goal for what we wanted the school to be, and we did it. If you had told me back then that this is what the school would become in 5–7 years, I would not have believed it. We exceeded our expectations."

## The Legacy of Service

Deborah and Abi's stories are a testament to the power of committed parents. Both leaders were motivated by a simple truth: "You realized quickly that all the extras were because parents were doing it. If a field trip was going to happen, it's because parents were driving." Their volunteerism wasn't just

about putting in hours; it was about building a culture. They led by example, demonstrating that the best way to ensure the school's success is to jump in and contribute their unique skills. Abi noted upon reflection that while investing in the various areas of volunteerism at UA, she experienced personal growth in her own skills and abilities as well as connections made along the way.

The school's physical buildings and robust programs are a tangible legacy of their efforts. But their real legacy lies in the spirit of volunteerism they helped forge. To the parents who are here now, their message is clear and inspiring:

From Abi, whose eldest graduated in 2024 as a Legacy Student and is now in her second year at university: "I have seen the tangible success these students are having in the real world. They are confident people, comfortable with taking risks and well prepared to take on the challenges they encounter. Through involvement in the school, parents can contribute directly, shaping the future UA graduates."

And from Deborah, whose youngest daughter is a member of the Class of 2026, when considering all she has learned and done these last 21 years at UA, she shares, "Urban Academy is perpetually building for the next generation of students. So many opportunities exist for parents to get involved and find meaningful ways to contribute their skills and strengths to the growth of this wonderful school for our children, and by doing so, realize the true beauty of this community."

Their journey proves that Urban Academy's strength isn't only in its buildings, programming or curriculum, but in the people who are willing to roll up their sleeves and build it for the next generation. It's an invitation to all of us to find our place in this story and contribute to the legacy that is Urban Academy.



Chair, Deborah McKenzie, leading the AGM in Uptown's Multipurpose Room (2016)



Chair, Abi Johnston, welcoming guests to celebrate the class of 2019





## CHARTING OUR COURSE: THE FUTURE OF UA

**KATE BEGENT-CONNORS** / Board Chair

**MIKE SLINGER** / Head of School

Urban Academy's vision for the future, while directed by the Strategic Plan, is a morphing living set of ideas and directions, adjusted by community feedback, careful analysis of information, opportunity and the entrepreneurial spirit that it took to get Urban Academy where it is today. It is a shared roadmap forged through close collaboration between the Board of Directors and the school's leadership. Together, the responsibility is to steward Urban Academy toward a future defined by strategic growth, unwavering financial stability and a deep commitment to our community's values. The path ahead is clear, and it is built on a foundation of listening, learning and leading.

The focus is on three key areas that will ensure the continued excellence and permanence of Urban Academy.

The first pillar is **strategic growth and capital planning**. You've seen the early results of this work with projects like Rousseau House and the improvements to our campus. These aren't isolated efforts; they are part of a long-range plan to enhance our existing facilities and explore exciting opportunities for expansion. This work is about ensuring we have the physical spaces needed to support our innovative programs and accommodate future generations of students.

The second pillar is **long-term financial health**. The Board is dedicated to the ongoing strength of the school, which means we are constantly working on detailed plans for everything from advancement and tuition fees to staffing. This careful and constant oversight ensures that Urban Academy can provide the rich, hands-on learning experiences you value, while also investing in our future. We want our families to know their financial commitment is recognized and deeply valued and that we are being responsible stewards of those resources.

Finally, we are committed to **organizational excellence**. This involves a constant focus on strategic risk and regulatory

compliance, and using data-driven dashboards to monitor our performance on key indicators. Our governance is a model of best practices, a fact affirmed by our CAIS accreditation. This behind-the-scenes work provides the essential stability that allows our teachers to focus on what they do best: educating our students.

The direction we're heading isn't set in a vacuum; it is shaped by what we hear from our families. We know you value the strong relationships and deep connections between students and teachers. We've heard your appreciation for our balanced approach to arts and STEM, which has led to exciting new additions like our robotics, strings and expanding tech programs. You've told us you want more opportunities for outdoor learning and physical movement, and we are responding by enhancing these areas in our curriculum. The community's interest in capital expansion is a driving force behind our strategic planning efforts.

We also want to ensure you are aware of our confidence in our Senior School programming. The years a student spends in our Junior and Middle Schools are a journey and the Senior School years are where everything comes together. We are proud of our senior students' successes and the value of these culminating years, which prepare them for their universities of choice and beyond.

The future of Urban Academy is a shared vision, a journey we are on together. We believe that by working in unison—Board, leadership, staff and families—we will ensure that Urban Academy continues to be a place of excellence, innovation and community for many years to come.







## MOMENTS THAT MATTER: REFLECTIONS FROM THE UA TEACHING TEAM

### STAFF COLLABORATIVE ARTICLE

Every school year is made up of moments—some loud and public, others quietly powerful. At Urban Academy, those moments often unfold not just in lessons, but in shared conversations, rehearsals, trips and the quiet corners of classrooms where learning takes hold. As the 2024/25 school year drew to a close, teachers reflected on what stayed with them.

What emerged were stories that reveal their care, values, and impact in the moment and later on. As we enter our 25th year, the values and principles, opportunities to connect and care for students, are as true and valued today as they were at the beginning. This speaks to how deep and powerful teaching and learning at UA can be.

For many UA educators, the most memorable moments were those where students grew in surprising ways. These were breakthroughs not just in understanding, but in confidence and identity. Ms. Sarah, a Grade 2 teacher, witnessed one of these moments high above the ground. “During the high ropes course at camp, I watched one student push through real fear,” she said. “When they made it to the top, the pride on their face said everything.”

In the arts, this growth took a different form. Mr. Neilson, Grade 3 Teacher, recalled a visual art lesson. “With a van Gogh piece we were working on, students started to notice brushwork and emotion. It wasn’t just about making art anymore. It became a conversation about expression.”

For many teachers, it was the less visible shifts—those in mindset and self-belief—that carried the most meaning. As Ms. Brooke reflected, “When students work with younger students and bring them joy, it creates a chain reaction of kindness. It was beautiful to witness.”

Teachers also spoke of moments when students rose to academic and personal challenges. Music teacher Mr. Chan

described the way his students owned their growth outside the classroom: “They were still sending me video practice assignments over the summer,” he said. “They’ve internalized the idea of owning their learning and that’s something they’ll carry with them.”

Outdoor Education Lead, Ms. Manifold, shared the biggest growth she saw was when the Grade 4s slept away from home for the first time: “Grade 4s had the opportunity to literally step away from their comfort zones and enter their growth zone when they stayed in the gym for Camp UA. This memorable night filled them with a huge feeling of accomplishment and fostered newfound independence.”

And for students learning to navigate school and social life, the wins could be deeply personal. “Working with students to feel personally successful was one of the most rewarding parts of my year,” shared Ms. Pellegrin.

“Grade 2 students developed essential skills like communication, self-regulation and respect,” said Ms. Valla. “Those are things they’ll use far beyond our classroom walls.”

In JK, Ms. Davies found joy in how students internalized these values. “Every single reminder of how to transition to the carpet, how to show kindness, added up to a room where students knew how to belong and lead.” For many teachers, it’s the cumulative effect of real-life skill-building that reaffirms their purpose. “The independence, the confidence—I see it again and again when students are given responsibility,” said Kindergarten Teacher, Ms. Fischer, “It gets me every time.”

While the school year ends each June, the best lessons often follow students long after. Teachers shared stories of former students reaching out from their university years, a reminder that what’s built at UA continues to shape lives beyond its walls. “I had an alum tell me that the structure of our assignments helped them succeed in university,” said Social Studies teacher Mr. Forry. “That meant a lot. It was a reminder that our work here continues even after graduation.”

Teachers don’t always get to see the final outcome of the seeds they plant, but these reflections are a window into the impact they have as instructors, mentors, listeners and steady presences in students’ lives. These reflections show the human side of education, how moments of connection can shape not just a lesson, but a life. At Urban Academy, those moments matter and are happening every day.





# BUILDING A ZOO FROM SCRATCH... IN GRADE 3?

**MR. KEVEN NEILSON** / Teacher, Grade 3

**MR. DOUG MCQUIGGAN** / Teacher, Performing Arts

What do you get when you combine math, entrepreneurship, and a deep sense of inquiry? At Urban Academy, you get the Grade 3 Zoo Project—an ambitious, multi-week undertaking that transforms students into city planners, financial analysts, and animal caretakers. In the spring of 2025, what began as a simple lesson on area and perimeter evolved into a large-scale project that challenges students to think bigger, work together, and apply a year’s worth of learning in a truly hands-on way.

The premise is simple yet powerful: each group of students is tasked with designing a brand-new zoo for the city of New Westminster. They are given a specific plot of land and a detailed catalogue of animals, buildings, and staff. As they map out their zoo, students must consider everything from the unique space requirements of each animal to the placement of essential facilities like bathrooms, restaurants, and gift shops. Every decision has a purpose, pushing them to balance the needs of both the animals and the visitors.

## Learning by Doing: Inquiry in Action

This isn’t just a creative exercise; it’s a demonstration of inquiry learning come to life and a deep dive into the Grade 3 math curriculum. Using technology like Google Spreadsheets, students are required to crunch the numbers for their zoo’s design. This project is a culmination of a year’s worth of learning, touching on everything from geometry (calculating area and perimeter) and financial literacy (determining the cost of animals and staff) to data analysis (creating charts and graphs to represent their work).

According to Mr. McQuiggan, the project was designed to be challenging while remaining achievable for everyone. “It has a high ceiling but a low floor,” he explains. “As long as students are willing to work together, there is a way for them to succeed.” This framework allowed students to tap into their different strengths, with each group member contributing in their own unique way.



The real magic of the Zoo Project lies in its ability to foster essential skills. While the project is a wonderful example of staff collaboration between the two teachers, both Mr. McQuiggan and Mr. Neilson also agree that the project was an exemplary case for group work. It forced students to refine their communication skills and be open-minded to their peers’ ideas.

“The students had a great time and were always excited to work on the project,” Mr. Neilson notes. “They were incredibly engaged and even worked on it outside of class time.” The enthusiasm was infectious, and the creative ideas sparked new ideas not only within groups but also across the classroom.

The project lends itself well to ensuring that every student is known, stretched, and future-ready. It stretched the thinking of even the quickest students, as they had to carefully check their work for mistakes. For others, it highlighted their strengths and allowed them to learn collaboratively from their teammates. The project culminated in a grand finale where groups calculated their total debt and yearly income to determine how long it would take for their zoos to pay off their loans—a lesson in real-world finance they won’t soon forget.

The Grade 3 Zoo Project is a testament to the power of inquiry-based learning, demonstrating that when you give students a challenge they are passionate about, they will rise to the occasion.







# THE POWER OF EARLY INTERVENTION

**MS. KHATEREH DADAR** / Principal, Junior School

*“Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)”*

*~First People's Principles of Learning*

To understand early intervention, we need to start by unpacking what Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is and how it is implemented at Urban Academy. UDL is a framework developed by CAST, a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to making learning accessible for all learners, that can be applied to any curriculum. It anticipates and reduces barriers so that all students can access learning. It is a proactive approach to planning learning environments and experiences that is meant to support all learners from the start, not retrofitted for some students who may require additional support. It is based on the understanding that an accommodation required by one student can be a support for other students in the classroom.

The three principles of UDL are:

- 1. Multiple Means of Representation:** sharing information in different ways so all children can understand
- 2. Multiple Means of Action and Expression:** giving children different options to show what they've learned
- 3. Multiple Means of Engagement:** providing choice and activities that spark children's interest and help them stay engaged

In all UA Junior School classes, you will see many examples of all these supports available to all students. Some examples of these supports in the intentional design of learning environment and the community culture include: flexible seating options, access to regulation tools, use of visuals, essential class agreements developed with students to foster agency, common language for social thinking and problem

solving and clearly established routines. UDL practices are also in place in all academic areas and assessment practices.

Some examples of systemic barriers to learning that which UDL approach aims to prevent and remediate are unclear learning outcomes, one-size-fits-all curriculum, lack of cultural responsiveness, limited access to technology and physical barriers, among others.

At Urban Academy, we implement a tiered Response To Intervention (RTI) System. **Tier 1** includes the strategies and resources every student receives and is designed to meet the needs of about 80% of learners in the classroom. All UDL supports fall within this category. **Tier 2** provides additional, focused, small-group interventions for roughly 15% of students. **Tier 3** offers more targeted, individualized support for approximately 5% of students in order to have success at school.

When a child receives a diagnosis, whether related to learning, neurological or developmental delays, or social-emotional development, the earlier the targeted support begins, the more effective the outcomes. According to the Human Early Learning Partnership's (HELP) Early Development Instrument (EDI) Wave 8, nearly one in three Kindergarten children in British Columbia start school vulnerable in at least one area, like language, emotional maturity, or physical health. These early gaps can grow bigger without intervention, affecting confidence, friendships, and academic progress. Early intervention programs such as counselling, Learning Resource support, speech therapy, OT support, small-group reading instruction, or classroom push-in support can significantly reduce the need for more intensive remediation later.

In the past 3 years, since we have implemented a more systematic approach to student support and Early intervention in Junior school at UA, I have seen tremendous results by the time the students leave Grade 3. Whether these were targeted self-regulation supports specified in an IEP or an intensive, focused reading support program, the transformation is phenomenal. At Urban Academy, we believe that this is what all students deserve.







## GROWING UP, GAINING INDEPENDENCE: THE MIDDLE SCHOOL JOURNEY

**MS. CLARE MANIFOLD** /Acting Principal, Middle School

Middle School at UA spans Grades 4–7, and as families with children this age know, it is a pivotal and transformative period in a child’s journey. It’s the time when students transition from the structured world of elementary school into a new environment that encourages greater independence, critical thinking, and self-discovery. To embrace this shift, the UA program expands opportunities in these years in order to help students grow, ultimately preparing them for a seamless and successful transition to senior school.

### Adventures Beyond the Classroom

A cornerstone of our middle school philosophy is getting students outside of the classroom and into the world. We believe and research supports that some of the most profound lessons are learned through hands-on, experiential learning. Adults reflecting on pivotal moments in their own educational journeys will often highlight ‘that trip, that club or that experience’ as meaningful memories that helped shape their own futures.

To this end, the UA program features multiple overnight outdoor education experiences for every grade level.

In Grades 4 and 5, students begin their overnight outdoor education journeys with a stay at “Camp UA” and then adventures to Camp Summit (Grade 4) and Camp Elphinstone (Grade 5). As they progress through middle school, these overnight experiences build on previous skill development.

The Grade 6 and 7 students attend fall camp at Gibsons Farm and go on multi-night stays in the spring, with the Grade 6 students returning to Camp Summit and the Grade 7 students going to Strathcona Park Lodge. With each adventure, students are challenged to step out of their comfort zone and grow in their leadership and teamwork skills, all while surrounded by a breathtaking natural setting.

These overnight trips are just one facet of our commitment to outdoor learning. Our local mountains offer seasonal opportunities for students to explore and challenge themselves. In the winter, Grades 4 and 5 students strap on snowshoes to explore the trails and learn about winter ecosystems and winter survival strategies, while Grades 6 and 7 hit the slopes for downhill skiing and snowboarding. These experiences not only promote physical health but also teach students the importance of preparation, safety, and perseverance.







## Where Passions and Talents Grow

Beyond the outdoors, the *Explorations Program* is an innovative UA initiative that allows students to dive deep into possible new passions. This unique series of courses offers students the chance to explore a wide range of subjects. While courses can change slightly each year, this year's Explorations for Grades 4 and 5 include Drama, Visual Arts, Music and Applied, Design, Skill, and Technologies (ADST); and for Grades 6 and 7, it includes Health & Wellness, Eco-Innovators, Drama, and Media Arts. It is in the Explorations Program where students develop the critical and creative thinking skills that will be essential for success in senior school and beyond.

Beyond academics and expeditions, extracurricular and athletic opportunities allow students to discover new interests and build community. Students can find their voice in the Rock Band, strategize in the rapidly growing Chess Club, become coders in Robotics, or lead change through various green initiatives. Athletically, we field competitive teams across many sports, including volleyball, basketball, ultimate frisbee, cross-country, track and field and soccer, which builds sportsmanship skills, discipline, and a healthy competitive spirit.

Middle School students are at a vital stage in their development. It is where students are given the space to become independent thinkers, compassionate leaders, and confident individuals. The skills learned and the bonds formed during these formative years provide a strong foundation, setting them up for a successful and rewarding journey through senior school and beyond.







# UNLEASHING POTENTIAL: LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE AT URBAN ACADEMY

**MME. DÉBORAH DUMORTIER** / Acting Principal, Senior School

Education is an unfolding journey that significantly extends beyond the classrooms of Urban Academy. Students are challenged to stretch and step up, whether by moving beyond their comfort zone, embracing a leadership role, launching a new initiative, or driving service efforts that make a real impact both within the school and the wider community. These opportunities empower students to cultivate essential skills, embrace innovation, demonstrate adaptability and build competence.

By actively participating in these programs, students not only develop key skills but also become the architects of positive change.

## Student-Led Leadership in Action

Leadership and service take a variety of forms across the Middle and Senior Schools. Many of the most vibrant examples are created and owned by the students themselves. Student-created opportunities range from forming and leading an Inclusivity Club—where students can impact the school in a positive way—to pursuing their passion for literacy by volunteering in the library, to some students starting a Study Club to informally mentor their peers. Additional opportunities range from leading the Business Club to taking part in Performing Arts leadership roles, and of course, a plethora of opportunities coaching, managing, scorekeeping and refereeing in athletics. Regardless of their areas of interest, students take ownership of the learning environment and demonstrate initiative in meaningful ways.

There are also more formal service leadership opportunities. With a successful launch last year, Grade 10–12 Students can again enrol in Peer Tutoring, where they support students from across a variety of grades and subjects. New this year is a Student Leadership Course available to Grade 10–12 Students, which offers students the opportunity to take a leading role in shaping school culture and student life while incorporating service opportunities. Students plan, organize, and run school-wide events such as Terry Fox, student socials, community events and other exciting student initiatives that will be rolled out throughout the year.







## Stretching Minds, Building Character

Helping to set the groundwork for long-term leadership and service, another extracurricular program continues to build momentum. Model United Nations (MUN), currently one of our most popular and successful academic-based leadership opportunities in UA's Senior School. Through MUN, students commit to researching and preparing for conferences on their own time. They explore global issues, international relations, and diplomacy while developing skills in research, public speaking, and critical thinking. Serving as delegates at conferences across the Lower Mainland, students learn about international relations and engage in debate and negotiate resolutions. Through their participation in MUN, students collaborate under pressure and experience the impact of their voice on a global stage... priming them for roles of diplomacy and leadership in the future.

The common thread uniting all these experiences is a fundamental commitment to stretching every student and developing the characteristics of a UA Graduate. Whether they are tackling a global issue at MUN, orchestrating a whole-school event, supporting students in their academics, pioneering a new club, or completing a Duke of Edinburgh expedition, our students are fundamentally challenged to step beyond their comfort zones for the greater good of the community.



## PROFILE OF AN URBAN ACADEMY GRADUATE

### Thinker

They can think critically, collaboratively and creatively. They seek the deeper meaning of issues that arise and connect ideas to understand and be solutions-oriented to complex problems that emerge in a constantly changing world.

### Innovative

They embrace uncertainty and complexity. They are intellectual explorers who are action-oriented and reflect continuously. They display mental resilience by being agile in response to change and adapting positively to adversity.

### Courageous

They are open-minded, curious, willing to take intellectual risks and accept challenges. They push beyond their comfort zones and know that through challenges comes growth, courage and resilience.

### Compassionate

They intentionally show grace, patience, respect and empathy in their interactions with others. Through listening, accountability and service they are driven to improve their school, local and global communities as caring members.

### Balanced

They understand the importance of academic, physical, mental and emotional balance to achieve personal well-being for themselves and for others. They have varied interests that offer a strong foundation in supporting their future goals and endeavours.

### Principled

They act with integrity, honesty and forethought. They have a strong sense of justice and a moral compass that guides their independent decision-making.

### Culturally Responsive

They validate and celebrate a diversity of cultures, languages and life experiences. They are open-minded and understand multiple perspectives exist and as a result are willing to grow, learn and relearn. They actively ensure all cultures and voices are uplifted.





## FROM ABC'S TO AI: DEFINING THE NEW ERA OF K-12 LEARNING

**MS. SONJA KENNEDY** / Director of Development

Navigating the rapid advancements in technology, particularly in artificial intelligence, presents both unprecedented opportunities and new responsibilities. Educators at Urban Academy prepare students not only to use these powerful tools but to do so thoughtfully and ethically, ensuring every student is future-ready. We embrace this challenge by integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into student learning in a way that fosters innovation while prioritizing responsible execution.

Two years ago, staff began focusing on integrating AI into the UA educational context. By developing a system to ensure students know when and how to use these tools appropriately, there is a shared understanding between staff and students. This starts at the beginning of the school year when teachers review expectations with students around an academic integrity agreement that they sign with parents. This process provides an opportunity to discuss the implications of burgeoning and accessible AI tools. To make it easy to share expectations, UA uses a 'stoplight' system, which clarifies when AI can be used, ranging from not at all to a fully integrated tool for a given assignment.



Staff are mindfully but actively using a range of AI tools across different subjects. This flexible, school-wide approach allows us to balance innovation with thoughtful integration. The ways students are using AI are evolving at every grade level. Some examples illustrate the UA approach:

- **An AI Introduction:** In Grade 4, for one project, students focus on developing clear communication and iterative thinking skills, learning how precise language and careful instructions can produce better results. To practice this, Mr. Pascoe's students use Canva Magic Studio to generate AI artwork for their personal and creative narratives. By experimenting with different word choices and phrasing, students see firsthand how small changes can dramatically affect the images the AI produces, helping them build skills in problem-solving, research, and clear expression.
- **Career Exploration:** Grade 10 students in Career Education use AI to explore and deepen their understanding of obscure or unknown career paths, particularly in a changing job market.
- **Study and Critical Thinking:** AI can be used as an effective study tool. As Ms. Marsh explains, "Senior School students have used AI to create practice assessments for their Chemistry and Biology units. It can provide scenarios and ask students to explain their reasoning, offering feedback on the quality of their answers—much like a teacher would."
- **Environmental Science Projects:** In some Environmental and Life Science projects, students have utilized machine learning models, like Google's Teachable Machine, to train an AI to accomplish a specific environmental task. One group even created an app that could identify invasive versus native species in Hume Park.

The most common uses we see among both staff and students are for idea generation and the automation of simple tasks, such as structuring a lab report or drafting a professional email.

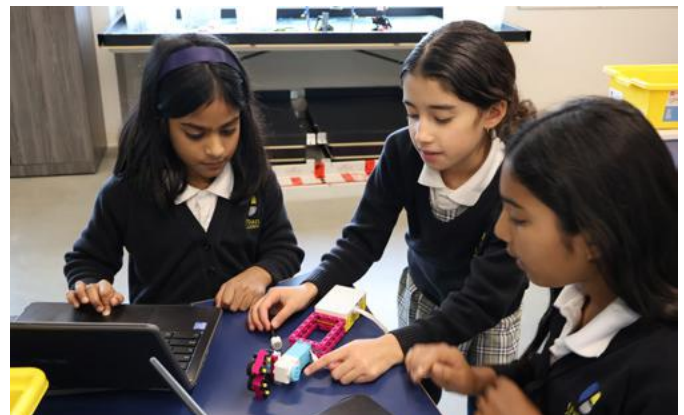


While research and programs are more readily available for staff working with Middle and Senior School students, there is a significant opportunity to develop clarity and programming around the role of AI in the Junior School. Ms. Han, UA Grade 1 Teacher, has started her Master's Program in Technology that will explore just that. With the challenge of not having an 'AI Curriculum' set by the Ministry of Education, schools are required to create their own curriculum internally.

Ms. Han offers the perspective that Junior School students are well versed in using technology at home, but there needs to be well-researched and thoughtful programming that integrates AI into early learning. "We'd like Junior School students to know what it means to research online, for instance, what a database is, what a keyword is, and what the important elements of digital citizenship are. We teach them how to read and how to behave, but this is equally as important in today's world." This year, she is using her learning to incorporate many of these elements as well as her learning into the big end-of-year Unit of Inquiry project.

Beyond our classrooms, Urban Academy is part of larger initiatives. As a CAIS member school, we use AI benchmarks to compare our AI maturity and usage levels with other esteemed schools throughout the country. Also, under the umbrella of the Independent School Association of BC (ISABC), Heads of Schools and school leaders are collaborating in order to develop best practices around AI use in independent education. Together, this group is working to answer questions such as "how much should teachers use AI for tasks like lesson and unit plans, and marking?" This more universal work, as well as the work being done at UA, is essential to developing the best path forward in ensuring that every child is future-ready.

Urban Academy is committed to the best use of AI, which includes promoting digital literacy, understanding algorithmic bias, considering data ethics, and recognizing the environmental impact of large-scale computing. By integrating these themes, students will become responsible and informed users of technology in an ever-changing world.







**MRS. PATRICIA BROOKE** / Teacher, Drama

The Performing Arts are alive and well and filling the hallways with the sounds of cellos, musical numbers and drums. Students throughout JK–Grade 12 have a host of in-class and extracurricular opportunities this year, some of which are brand new to UA students. Exposure to the arts really is seen as a continuum that students build upon each year.



In JK–Grade 3 Performing Arts, students explore various aspects of music, drama and dance. After learning the basics in these art forms, students will use technology and instruments to develop and perform their own creative works in groups or individually. The focus is on building up personal confidence and the comfort of being in front of an audience performing.

***Did you know?** Participating in performing arts helps students in their personal development. Students develop self-confidence and emotional intelligence, and it also provides stress release.*



In Middle School, students have an opportunity to further develop and explore their interests. Nothing says fall like the squeaks and screeches coming from the band room as students are introduced to the woodwind and brass instruments for the first time. New this year, Grades 6 and 8 students also get the chance to learn string instruments as Mr. Chan teaches them about violins, violas, cellos and basses. Grade 6 students will take a half-year of strings and a half-year of band before moving on to their favourite choice of the two for Grade 7 and beyond.

***Did you know?** The performing arts are valuable in skill development. Students learn communication, creativity and problem solving, teamwork, discipline and memory building.*







Students in Grades 4–7 have the opportunity to join the Middle School Drama Club, where they rehearse after school every Monday and get to showcase their acting and singing skills at the Winter Concert in *The Holly Jolly Jalopy* and in the Spring Showcase in the musical *Pirates Past Noon*. Grade 4–7 students also have drama incorporated into their exploration rotations, where students lean into performance skills—skills that are helpful for their extracurricular and academic lives in Senior School.



**Did you know?** Universities care about extracurricular activities because they help show a student's passion, dedication, leadership and time management skills, making them a more well-rounded candidate.

Senior School is the time for students to really hone their skills. In the Drama program, students compete in Starfest with monologues, group musical performances, scene performances, one-act plays and solo songs. In the spring, you'll have a chance to see the Senior Theatre Company perform the musical *The Drowsy Chaperone*. New this year, students in Grades 8 and 9 will be working together to either perform, make the props and masks, or provide background vocals and drumming, culminating in a performance of *The Lion King*.



**Did You Know?** UA students who performed the one-act play *Hamlette* at Starfest were one of only two schools in the western finals to receive an advanced standing, and the Improv Team finished fourth in the provincial tournament.

In the world of Senior School music, the Wind Ensemble is open to all students in Grades 8–12, regardless of prior experience and is gearing up for performances throughout the year. A first-ever trip to the *Con Brio Festival* in Whistler is also an option for all Grade 7–12 music students. Hart Zawadiuk (Gr. 12) and Walden Ly-Sit (Gr. 12) have taken their musical skills from UA out into the world and are members of the prestigious Vancouver Youth Symphony Orchestra (VYSO) and Lia Kim (Gr. 8) VSO School of Music Youth String Ensemble.

**Did you know?** Our alumni have been accepted into some of the most prestigious programs for film and theatre. Kaede Wardley at Cap U for Film, Illya Mulji at Cap U for musical theatre, Charlie Fallowfield at Cap U for musical theatre, Sam Brooke accepted into Technical Theatre at SFU, but chose to study Computer Science and continues to work on theatre productions.



**Are you ready to rock?** Last year, the Middle School Rock Band took UA by storm, appearing at several assemblies, concerts and school events. This year, the senior students want in on the action, and UA will have its first Senior Rock Band!

**Did you know?** You can catch Illya Mulji (UA Class of 2023) in the Gateway Production of *Annie*. And, that Sam Brooke (UA Class of 2024) was nominated for a Cleo for Lighting Design for his work on The Royal Canadian Theatre Company's production of *The Woman in Black*.





## THE UNWRITTEN CURRICULUM: THE POWER OF STUDENT LIFE

**MR. MIKE TWAITES** / Associate Principal, Student Life

In a child's education, the classroom is only half the story. A significant measure of a student's readiness for the future lies in what happens outside of it. This is the realm of Student Life. It's the vital constellation of athletics, arts, extracurricular activities, leadership roles and travel that defines the UA experience. This isn't just about fun; it's where students build connections, discover deep passions and forge the essential skills that cannot be taught through curriculum alone.

If the goal is to prepare every student for tomorrow, then Student Life is the critical catalyst.

The belief that participation in extracurricular activities only strengthens student success is supported by educational research. Studies consistently show that involvement in organized school activities translates directly into real-world and academic benefits:

- ▶ **Academic Gains:** Research indicates that students who participate in extracurricular activities often have higher grades, better test scores and more consistent attendance. These activities build 'executive functioning' skills like organization, time management and follow-through, making students more effective learners.
- ▶ **Character Development:** Participation fosters high levels of self-concept and self-worth. Whether through team sports or academic clubs, students learn the values of individual and group responsibility, persistence and how to effectively accept constructive criticism.
- ▶ **Future-Ready Skills:** Group activities are essential for developing the 'soft skills' demanded by universities and employers: leadership, teamwork, communication and resilience.

In short, Student Life ensures that growth isn't limited to academics but stretches into leadership, resilience and creativity, directly preparing our students for what comes next.

The UA Student Life program is deliberately structured to evolve with our students, offering new challenges at every level of their journey:

- ▶ **Junior School:** The Age of Discovery. For our youngest students, Student Life is about broad exposure. A variety of opportunities built right into their curriculum, from performing and fine arts, to languages, to technology, help them explore new skills, build connections across grades and gain confidence in a structured group setting.
- ▶ **Middle School:** Focused Skill Building. Building off those foundational skills, Middle School students dive deeper. They continue with enriching opportunities in performing arts, athletics and increasingly specialized programs like robotics.
- ▶ **Senior School:** Cultivating Empowerment. As our Seniors narrow their focus toward post-secondary learning, the emphasis shifts heavily to leadership and competitive opportunities. Clubs like Model United Nations and Business Club are highly popular, and students are strongly encouraged to become active leaders.

With a commitment to ensuring every student is 'stretched' in their thinking and experiences, Student Life provides an environment for this growth, primarily through structured leadership roles.



We actively involve older students in supporting our younger communities. For example, many Senior School students with a passion for sports serve as mentors in our athletics program, bringing their knowledge and energy to younger teams. Similarly, older students often run clubs for Junior School students, such as TED Talks or study clubs.

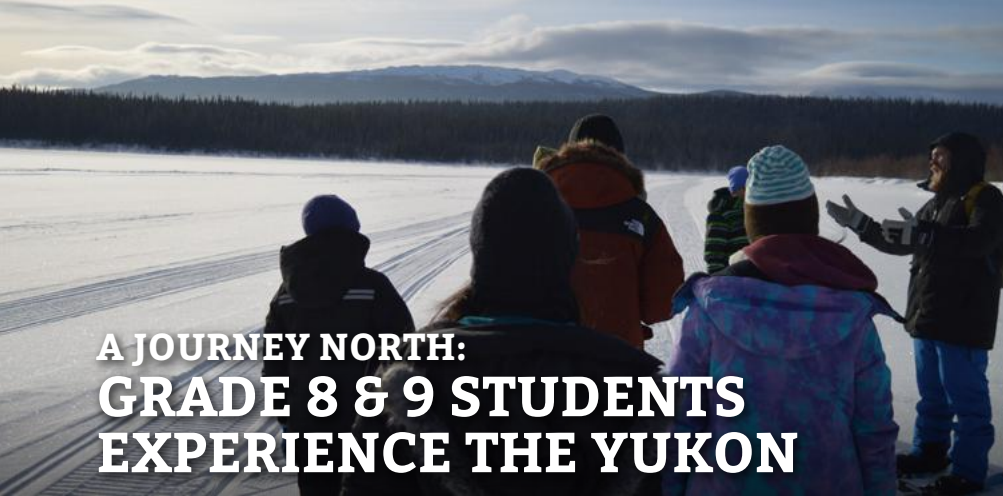
As the school continues to grow, so too will opportunities across all domains. UA's goal is not just to maintain, but to expand Student Life:

- **Athletic Excellence:** In athletics, we have shifted from numerous multi-grade teams to grade-specific teams. The ability to create teams that can compete for provincial championships and hang banners in our gym is an exciting goal that will provide deeper team commitment and competitive experience. UA is also at the stage where some teams may require try-outs in order to select students for specific teams and travelling teams.
- **Empowered Student Voice:** We are committed to continuing to grow our students' voices, ensuring they have the ability to co-create the activities that shape their school life.
- **Valued Leadership:** We will continue to expand opportunities for our students to lead across many different domains, providing them with valuable assets for their future endeavours.

By continuously growing and investing in Student Life, Urban Academy ensures that every student is known, challenged, and ultimately ready to contribute to the world they are inheriting.







## A JOURNEY NORTH: GRADE 8 & 9 STUDENTS EXPERIENCE THE YUKON

**MS. CLARE MANIFOLD** / Acting Principal, Middle School

(February 3–7, 2025) 21 Grade 8 and 9 students embarked on an unforgettable journey to the Yukon. This trip was more than just a getaway; it was an immersive educational experience focused on Indigenous traditions, gold rush history, and sustainable living.

Students dove headfirst into the region's unique culture. They had the opportunity to learn and try their hand at the art of glass blowing. A true highlight was experiencing life off-grid at a lakeside lodge, which provided a firsthand look at sustainable living and the beauty of the remote wilderness.

The adventure continued with some iconic northern activities, including dog sledding across the snowy landscape. They also gained valuable insights into wildlife conservation with a tour of the Yukon Wildlife Preserve and explored the vibrant downtown of Whitehorse.

Braving the cold, the students bonded over shared experiences, creating lasting friendships and memories. This trip offered a unique opportunity for them to step outside the classroom and connect with the rich cultural heritage and breathtaking natural environment of the Yukon.







## EXPLORING THE IBERIAN PENINSULA: GRADE 10–12 STUDENTS IN PORTUGAL AND SPAIN

**MR. KIERAN FORRY /**  
Teacher, Senior School

(March 10–18, 2025) 11 Grade 10–12 students had the opportunity to visit Portugal and Spain on a whirlwind tour of some of the most impressive cultural sites of the Iberian Peninsula. Students visited historic sites and monuments, and experienced the food and culture of this unique part of Europe.

In a move that would set the tone for the trip, the group combined culture and history in Lisbon, which was exemplified by having *pastel de nata* (Portuguese egg tarts) from Fábrica de Pastéis de Belém, the bakery that invented the pastry in 1837, still operating in its original site! Next was the Évora, and the Chapel of Bones, a 19th-century ossuary in a delightfully scenic town, close to the border with Spain. This town is also famous for its locally grown cork, which is used to produce numerous clothes, shoes, and other artifacts for people to collect as souvenirs.



Next were the Spanish cities of Seville and Cordoba, in the province of Andalusia. Both were full to the brim with cultural and historic sites, and the students were impressed by the scale of Seville's cathedral, and of Cordoba's *La Mezquita*, the Cathedral/Mosque dating from A.D. 784. Luckily, the weather held out for us. With the exception of a pretty intense downpour while we were in the Giralda bell tower! We also undertook flamenco lessons and were treated to a performance from our instructors.

Finally, we visited the best that Madrid, the capital, had to offer. This included a visit to the *Museo Nacional del Prado*, where students were invited to see one of Leonardo da Vinci's other copies of the Mona Lisa. We also went to the *Reina Sofía* for a look at Picasso's impressive *Guernica*. Things were rounded out with a European cafe experience of churros and hot chocolate at what I was assured was the best place for this in Madrid!







# UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH'S AWARD AT URBAN ACADEMY

**MS. CLARE MANIFOLD** / Acting Principal, Middle School

The Duke of Edinburgh's (Duke of Ed) Award is a globally recognized program that provides a unique framework for students in Grades 9–12 to develop into well-rounded, resilient young adults. It's an opportunity for students to step outside their comfort zone, discover new skills and make a tangible difference in their community and beyond. At Urban Academy, in this first year of the program, we are incredibly proud that over 40% of UA Grade 9–12 students have jumped in to take part in an initiative that will enrich their student experience.

## What is the Duke of Ed?

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is an international program that challenges young people to take on a journey of self-development. It is a non-competitive, voluntary program with three levels: Bronze, Silver and Gold. Participants set personal goals in four key areas:

- ▶ **Volunteering:** Giving back to the community and making a positive contribution to society. This can include anything from volunteering at a local senior center to helping out at school with reading initiatives for younger students. Students select an area of interest and passion they have for their community and complete the required volunteer hours.
- ▶ **Physical Recreation:** Improving fitness and performance while enjoying a healthy lifestyle. This can be a team sport, a solo activity or a new fitness challenge.
- ▶ **Skill Development:** Developing a talent, broadening abilities and increasing self-confidence. This can be anything from learning to play an instrument to developing coding skills.
- ▶ **Adventurous Journey:** Planning, training for and undertaking an outdoor expedition. This is often the highlight of the program, fostering teamwork, resilience and a love for the outdoors.

## Upcoming Adventurous Journeys: Exploring BC's Natural Beauty

This year, the Duke of Edinburgh program will begin with students completing a local day hike. As they navigate trails, set up gear and work together, students not only strengthen friendships and bonds with UA's program leaders but also begin to develop the confidence, independence and practical skills that will carry them through not only the Bronze Award, but all levels of the Duke of Ed program.

In the spring, students will have the opportunity to complete their Adventurous Journey by hiking some of British Columbia's most iconic local mountains. Our Bronze Award participants will be tackling the challenging trails of the Stawamus Chief in Squamish. This self-supported, overnight camp is a fantastic test of endurance, featuring steep sections with ladders and chains and rewarding climbers with breathtaking panoramic views of Howe Sound and Garibaldi Provincial Park.

Outdoor experiences will become more challenging as students progress through the Duke of Edinburgh program, working toward their Silver Award in 2026/27 and Gold Award in 2027/28. Next year, students who complete their Bronze Award this year will move on to the Silver level, which includes a mandatory two-night hike. These excursions help students develop practical outdoor skills such as navigation, campcraft, and risk management, while also fostering teamwork, resilience, problem-solving and self-confidence.





## Why is the Duke of Ed so valuable?

While the award is not an academic achievement, it is highly valued by universities worldwide. It demonstrates a student's commitment, perseverance and ability to manage multiple responsibilities, qualities that are essential for success in higher education and the professional world. In a competitive landscape, the Duke of Ed Award helps students stand out by providing concrete evidence of their 'soft skills' such as leadership, teamwork, problem-solving and communication.

Beyond university applications, the program has a profound impact on a student's personal life. It builds confidence and self-esteem, encourages an active lifestyle and instills a sense of social responsibility. The challenges of the Adventurous Journey, in particular, teach invaluable lessons about planning, resilience and working together to overcome obstacles.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is a marathon, not a sprint. It's a journey that will create lasting habits and memories, equipping our students with the skills and confidence they need to thrive in a changing world. We encourage all eligible students to consider this incredible opportunity for personal growth and adventure.



## WHAT IS INQUIRY, AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

**MS. GABRIELA VALLA & MS. SARAH CARROLL** / Teachers, Grade 2

*At its heart, inquiry learning is about nurturing a child's natural curiosity. Think of it this way: instead of just giving students answers, they are becoming equipped with the skills to ask questions, explore, research, and discover those answers for themselves at UA. It's a student-driven journey where they construct their own understanding.*

An example from our Grade 2 classrooms is the exploration of the concepts of forces and motion. The BC Grade 2 science curriculum's 'Big Idea' is that forces influence the motion of an object. In a traditional setting, they might simply read a chapter about pushes and pulls. But in our inquiry classroom, teachers plan with a clear purpose, connecting this learning to the BC Curricular Competencies.

Students begin by asking questions like: "What are different ways that objects can be moved?" and "How do different materials influence the motion of an object?" They then explore and observe how forces like pushes, pulls, and friction affect the motion of toy cars on different surfaces, like a carpet, a tile floor, or a ramp. This is where they observe, explore, and begin gathering their data.

Research is another element of inquiry. Students might design a ramp or a simple machine to make an object move in a specific way. They are gathering and recording data and engaging in Applied Design, Skills, and Technology (ADST). Communicating their observations might include a poster or a simple puppet show, sharing their findings. By thinking critically about how forces and motion affect everything from playing sports to the movement of planets, students are making connections and drawing conclusions not only during the lesson, but also in their everyday living situations around them. Units of Inquiry are essentially big questions that guide our learning for several weeks. These units are carefully designed to be relevant, engaging, and challenging, allowing students to explore various subjects through a common lens.

This approach is about more than just Junior School; it's about preparing students for what comes next. In Middle and Senior School, students are expected to tackle complex projects and assignments that require them to think critically, collaborate, and solve problems independently. The inquiry skills they are developing now—asking good questions, researching effectively, and presenting their findings—are the foundational skills they will rely on throughout their academic careers. These are also the skills that employers seek in the modern workplace. By empowering children to be curious, independent learners, we are setting them up for a lifetime of success.

So next time you ask your child about their day, ask them about what they are still wondering about after their day of learning.





# URBAN ACADEMY CLASS OF 2025



**SPIRIT OF  
URBAN ACADEMY**  
Reese Kington



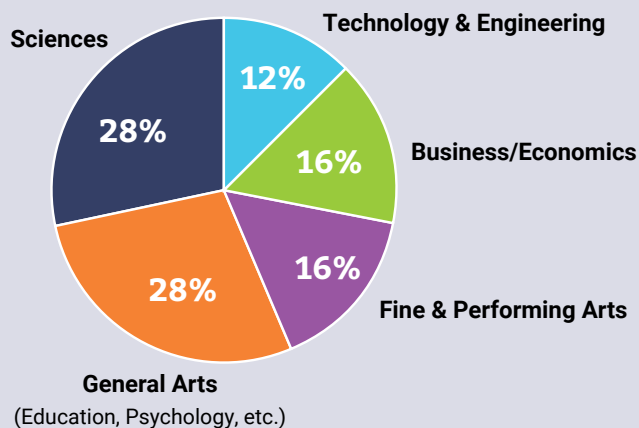
**CHERYLE BEAUMONT  
ACHIEVEMENT  
SCHOLARSHIP**  
Cindy Zhang



**RECOGNITION OF  
LEGACY STUDENTS**  
Naya Johnston (K), Alexander Weslowski (K), Reese Kington (JK)



## Post-Secondary Area of Study Grad Classes of '23, '24, '25



## Post-Secondary Acceptance Grad Classes of '23, '24, '25

### British Columbia

BCIT, Beedie School of Business (SFU), CapU, Douglas, Emily Carr, KPU, Langara, Sauder School of Business (UBC), SFU, TRU, UBC, UBCO, UNBC, UVIC, VIU

### Canada

AUArts, Haskayne School of Business (UofC), McGill, Northeastern University, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, OCAD, Queen's, UofA, UofC, UofT, UM, Waterloo, Western, York

### International

Babson College, UC Davis, UC Irvine, UC Santa Barbara, UCLA, University of Richmond, UW-Seattle



## AP AT UA: ACADEMIC RIGOUR MEETS REAL-WORLD READINESS



**MME. DÉBORAH DUMORTIER** / Acting  
Principal, Senior School

The Advanced Placement (AP) program enables willing and academically prepared students to engage in university-level studies—with the opportunity to earn post-secondary credit, advanced placement, or both—while still in Senior School at UA.

Supported by UA's smaller class sizes and ready access to teachers, the AP program stretches students academically, nurtures intellectual curiosity, and prepares them for the demands of higher education. By offering a rigorous curriculum, AP courses allow motivated students to deepen their knowledge, challenge themselves beyond the standard curriculum, and develop the skills necessary for future academic success.

A key advantage of the AP program is the emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are invaluable for university and beyond. The program also fosters independence and resilience, as students take responsibility for mastering

complex material and preparing for AP examinations.

AP examinations typically take place in the first two weeks of May. Students will write the subject exam in order to receive AP credit for their coursework. An AP exam score of 4 or 5 may also grant the student university credit or placement in a second-year course at some post-secondary institutions. Beyond academic recognition, universities value the AP program as a marker of a student's commitment to excellence, intellectual ambition and readiness for post-secondary challenges.

We are looking forward to seeing the program continue to grow as we are receiving consistently more requests from students interested in AP courses. We are confident that the AP program equips students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to thrive in higher education and prepares them for life beyond UA.

### AP Courses Offered in 2025/26

*AP Biology, AP Chemistry, AP Computer Science A, AP English Literature & Composition, AP Macroeconomics, AP World History*

## ALUMNI, READY FOR WHATEVER COMES NEXT

From classroom moments to real-world milestones, see how Urban Academy's approach to learning builds confidence that lasts a lifetime.

**Anamica Sidhu** (UA Alum, Class of '19) has completed her BSc from SFU and is now studying to become a Doctor of Audiology at Pacific University Oregon.

Watch the "Through the Lens" video series ➔

Highlighting the future-ready Alumni and Sr. School Students of UA



[urbanacademy.ca/watch](https://urbanacademy.ca/watch)



# A COUNSELLOR'S PERSPECTIVE: CHALLENGES CHILDREN & YOUTH FACE TODAY

**MS. TARA WORTH, MS. JULIA MCCARRON  
& MS. ANA DE PINHO GAST** / UA Counsellors

The experience of growing up today is marked by rapid change, unprecedented digital immersion and unique pressures that impact students from kindergarten through to graduation. For parents and educators, understanding these forces is the first step toward building the resilience and emotional agility children need to thrive. Students today are managing a unique set of interconnected challenges intensified by the modern world that changes slightly by developmental stage.



## **In Junior School: The Fight for Focus**

Younger children are struggling with the constant stimulation and instant gratification in today's culture. This makes it increasingly difficult for them to sustain focus in structured environments. There is a reduced tolerance for frustration and lower resilience. Often, well-meaning parents—concerned by a child's distress—step in to alleviate discomfort. This is a pattern that, while understandable, limits opportunities for children to build essential coping skills and emotional endurance.

## **In Middle School: The Turbulence of Transition**

The middle years are a period of profound transition. Hormonal shifts intensify emotional responses that can manifest as increased anxiety and depressive symptoms. Peer relationships become paramount, fuelling a heightened desire to fit in and a journey of self-discovery regarding identity. For neurodivergent students, this stage brings a sharper awareness of their strengths and challenges, requiring greater support from home and school.

## **In Senior School: Uncertainty and Identity**

Older students are navigating external pressures. They face uncertainty and fear around the future, often tied to the global political climate. They explore complex themes of gender and sexual identity, manage pressure around substance use/vaping and can face academic pressure to excel. This is all compounded by the constant visibility and comparison driven by social media, leading to widespread issues with online bullying and mental health challenges like anxiety and depression.

## **RESOURCES RECOMMENDED BY UA COUNSELLORS**

### **Anxiety & Worry Cycle**

*Lynn Lyons, LICSW*

Strategies to help children face fears and build courage, preventing parents from enabling the worry cycle.

**Book:** *Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents: 7 Ways to Stop the Worry Cycle and Raise Courageous and Independent Children*

**Podcast:** [flusterclux.com](https://flusterclux.com)

### **Confident & Resilient Kids**

*Dr. Becky Kennedy*

Insights on raising emotionally strong children, focusing on "Good Inside" principles and honouring the child's true self.

**Book:** *Good Inside*

**Podcast:** [goodinside.com](https://goodinside.com)

### **Comprehensive Mental Health**

*Kelty Mental Health*

A broad range of resources, support, and information for children and families across British Columbia.

Various articles, programs, and phone support.

**Website:** [keltymentalhealth.ca](https://keltymentalhealth.ca)



## What It Means For UA Students

Independent schools, like Urban Academy, are known for their rigorous academic standards. Students also understand that their families are investing in their future financially. While this can foster excellence, it can also create pressure to succeed—not just academically, but also in athletics, arts, and leadership. Families and students are encouraged to build awareness regarding if and where this may be occurring, and how to manage those expectations—either spoken or unspoken.

Another area to be aware of is the risk of peer comparison. Students may find themselves measuring their achievements against those of high-performing classmates, whether in grades, extracurricular activities, university goals or social standing. This ongoing comparison can leave even top students feeling like they're falling short.

Many UA students are also highly engaged in a range of academics, clubs, sports and service opportunities. While these experiences enrich their learning, families also need to be aware of the potential for over-scheduling and burnout as they balance their academics and post-secondary goals with their hobbies and passions.

UA Staff are aware that these pressures can arise, and as a team, are proactive in ensuring students feel supported and understood. It is a conscious and ongoing balance between offering support and allowing students to grow in their problem-solving skills, building that resilience that will serve them long term. As school counsellors, we play a key role in helping students develop emotional agility and self-compassion—skills that are just as critical as academic success in preparing for life beyond school.

## How Parents Can Build Resilience at Every Age

Research indicates that students who report having caring adults at home tend to fare better, but this support must evolve with the child. Here are some helpful tools for parents/guardians to consider.

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### Junior School (K–Grade 3)

**Model and Foster Independence:** Encourage curiosity over achievement. Model healthy coping (talk about feelings, problem-solve calmly). Provide consistent routines and ample time for unstructured play. Gently encourage independence instead of rescuing them from discomfort.

### Middle School (Grades 4–7)

**Non-Judgmental Connection:** Keep communication open so that children feel safe sharing worries and failures. Emphasize effort and growth over perfection. Encourage healthy risk-taking, allowing challenges to be seen as learning opportunities.

### Senior School (Grades 8–12)

**Validate and Support Autonomy:** Listen actively and validate their feelings without immediately trying to fix problems. Encourage self-compassion and realistic expectations. Support their autonomy in decision-making, and advocate for mental health support when necessary, normalizing help-seeking. Parents can also model their own self-care and healthy stress management tools.

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By being attuned to the unique pressures facing students in the Lower Mainland and collaborating closely with the school, parents can provide the essential anchor of support and care that helps their children navigate these challenges and thrive.

## Understanding ADHD

*Lynn Lyons, LICSW*

A resource specifically designed to help families and educators better understand, support, and manage children with ADHD.

Educational guides and information.

**Website:** [healthymindslearning.ca/rollingwith-adhd](http://healthymindslearning.ca/rollingwith-adhd)

## Societal & Digital Impact

*Jonathan Haidt*

An analysis of how social media and changes in childhood independence have affected the mental health of younger generations.

**Book:** *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*







## ROARING IN THE DEN: ATHLETICS HITS AN ALL-TIME HIGH

**MR. MIKE TWAITES** / Associate Principal, Student Life

These days, the Lions' Den is alive with unprecedented energy. Urban Academy's Athletics Department is celebrating a landmark year in 2024/25, marked not only by impressive victories but by a surging wave of student participation. Over the last few years, our programs have expanded steadily, but the beginning of the 2025/26 school year signals a massive leap forward, proving that more students than ever are choosing to be part of the action.

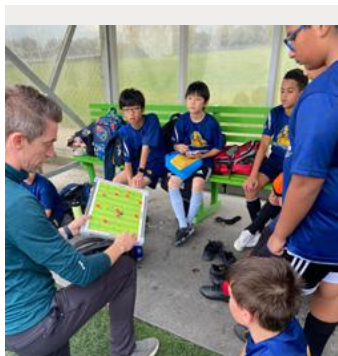
The most inspiring trend is the commitment from our students. We have already seen participation rates soar in the first term, jumping from 44% last year to an incredible 53% of all Middle School students taking part this year. In Senior School, participation exploded, rising from 31% to reach 50% of the entire Senior School student body participating in athletics in term one of 2025/26 compared to last year.





The days of small, multi-grade teams are fading as our programs mature, allowing us to build deeper competitive rosters and chase provincial goals. The court sports have had a significant part in driving much of the expansion:

- **Volleyball:** After fielding six teams last year, UA added another senior team for a total of seven teams this season. Crucially, this included running a Senior Girls Volleyball team for the first time, setting the stage for future competition at the provincial level.
- **Basketball:** Our basketball program continues its incredible growth trajectory. After expanding to eight teams last year (which included a Senior Boys team winning gold at the Lions Invitational Tournament), we are adding yet another senior team for the 2025/26 season, bringing our total to nine teams between Grades 5 and 12.
- **Badminton:** We enjoyed a strong spring season, and it remains a consistent draw for Senior School students, with about 25 athletes competing on three different senior teams.



Soccer is also now thriving year-round across the Middle and Senior Schools:

- **Girls' Dominance:** Our Middle School Girls Soccer team had an exceptional 2024/25 spring season, winning the Grizzly Cup and finishing 2nd place in the ISEA league. We anticipate running both Middle and potentially a new Senior Girls team this spring, depending on interest.
- **Boys' Expansion:** The 2025 fall season was marked by growth, running both a Middle School Boys team and adding a brand-new Senior Boys Soccer team.

Beyond the team sports, commitment to fitness and endurance remains strong:

- **Track and Field** continues to be popular, with typically over 50 students participating across Junior and Senior teams, culminating in one student competing at the provincial level.
- **Cross Country** draws around 40 students annually, proving especially popular among our Grade 3 and 4 students.

This jump in participation demonstrates that more students than ever are embracing the challenge, teamwork, and excitement that come with being an Urban Academy athlete. We have room in the trophy case and the gym walls in anticipation of trophies, medals and banners that are undoubtedly to come. The future is bright in the Lions' Den!





## ASK ME ANYTHING: THE UA LION SPEAKS

Who is the newest member of the UA pride? He's playful, proud, and always ready to cheer you on. We sat down with the UA Lion to learn more about his life, his lessons, and how he inspires students to roar with confidence.

### **What's your name?**

*I sure wish I knew! I'm discovering more about myself every day, and I'd love for Urban Academy students to help me. I've tried out classic names like Leo and King, and a few wild ones like Greg and Roary, but nothing feels quite right yet. Maybe one of you will help me find the perfect name to roar with pride!*

### **Where did you come from?**

*My mane first shimmered into being during the UA Carnival last year, glowing with the joy and excitement of every student. We're not entirely sure how it all works, but our best guess is that it was the roar of school spirit when the community came together.*

*Ever since, I've been roaming campus, cheering, giving high-fives and inspiring. I make sure every UA Lion remembers that a little school spirit and a big roar can go a long way.*

### **How old are you?**

*That's a tricky one! I first appeared at the UA Carnival last year, so in "school years," I'm still just a cub. Every day I grow, learn, and discover new ways to roar with pride.*

### **Do you have a family?**

*I do! I have a whole pride of lion friends at UA. Some are older, some are younger, and we all look out for each other. It's like having a big, noisy family that cheers together and roars together.*

### **What's your favourite sport?**

*My favourite sport? Impossible! It's like asking me to choose my favourite student. It simply cannot be done. With everything from Robotics (yes, I consider the precision of those movements a sport) to Volleyball, my mane gets tired just trying to keep up with the variety. I just claim the best seat in the house in the front row to cheer all the UA Lions on!*

### **What does it mean to you to be a UA Lion?**

*Being a UA Lion means showing the qualities we hope all students grow into. It's about being curious thinkers, brave enough to try new things and creative problem-solvers. It's about caring for others, staying balanced in body and mind and doing what's right.*

*It's also about celebrating everyone's unique stories and perspectives. Just like the Fraser River flows through many communities, these values flow through all of us. Being a UA Lion means carrying them with pride every day.*

### **Will you be celebrating UA's 25th Anniversary?**

*I never missed a party, and this one is super special! Not only will I get to hang out with my favourite lions and cubs, but we get to celebrate all the incredible, tireless people who envisioned and built this den of excellence! Honestly, it's the only party worth interrupting my 18-hour nap schedule for. Just make sure the cake is tiered and the spotlight is positioned correctly.*

### **How do you show courage when things get tough?**

*Courage isn't about never being scared. It's about showing up and trying your hardest every day. When things get tough, I take a deep breath, plant my paws firmly on the ground, and remind myself that I have a whole pride backing me up. Whether it's on the court, in the classroom or in the community, courage means staying strong, learning from challenges and never giving up.*

### **What advice do you have for students who want to roar with confidence?**

*My best advice? Believe in yourself and remember that your roar is unique. Confidence grows when you practice, try new things, and aren't afraid to make mistakes along the way. Surround yourself with friends who cheer you on, just like a lion's pride. And when you're ready, don't hold back, lift your head high and let your roar be heard.*



2024/25

# ANNUAL REPORT





# BOARD CHAIR REPORT



As Board Chair, I'm pleased to report on another successful year at UA. The Board's focus this year was on solidifying UA's identity, improving succession planning and establishing a structured cadence of Board education.

Clarifying the Board's vision for UA's identity is critical following our successful transition to a medium-sized school and to ensure we continue thriving into the future. Our identity is grounded in our mission, vision and values and informs decision-making on strategies including tuition, advancement, risk, capital planning and admissions. As stewards of this vision, the Board could not be more proud of the work done throughout the community to put these values and vision into practice every day, keeping us connected, inspired and empowered.

At UA, we have a legacy of strong leadership at both the staff and Board levels, and this is a tradition we intend to safeguard through succession planning practices that make leadership as meaningful, impactful and consistent as possible. The Board members are lifelong learners, and this year we prioritized governance education to ensure we have clarity on our responsibilities and how they differ from operational leadership. We also learned more about our role in championing our advancement strategy.

UA's landmark achievement this year was receiving CAIS Accreditation. This milestone was years in the making. I can't put into words the amount of effort undertaken by the Board, school leadership, staff, students and families in accomplishing this goal. This journey was a catalyst for growth and reflection, leaving us even more thankful for each other, the CAIS community, and the exceptional experience we have created at UA. I applaud the leaders at schools across Canada who contributed their time and wisdom to help us improve, and to CAIS, who has intentionally created a highly collaborative accreditation process and network.

This year, we thank Harry Parmar, Wade Carson and Steve Chen for their valuable service on the Board over the years. We will miss their experience, insights and wise counsel. We have welcomed Anna (Biying) He and Matthew Hudson, and thank them for serving UA in this capacity. I continue to be inspired by the dedication around the Board table and look forward to working with you all next year.

*Kate Begent-Connors*

**KATE BEGENT-CONNORS**  
Board Chair

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2024/25

Kate Begent-Connors, Chair  
Steve Chen, Vice Chair  
Joanne Ward, Secretary  
Wade Carson  
Iain Evans  
Anna (Biying) He  
Sunny Ghataurah  
Kimberly Grant  
Karim Merali  
Hafeez Merani  
Harry Parmar



CAIS Peer Review Team with UA Leadership (January 2025)



# HEAD OF SCHOOL REPORT

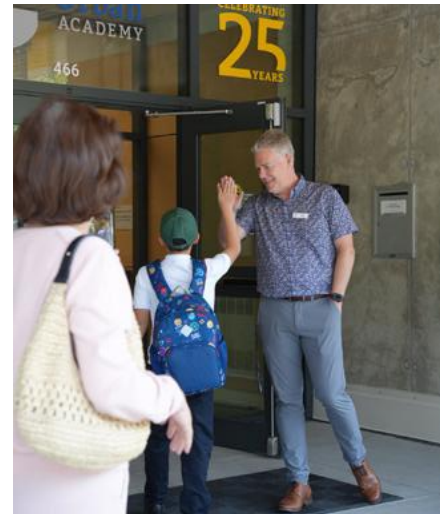


As I reflect on the 2024/25 academic year, I am filled with pride and gratitude for the staff, students, and families who made it all possible. This year marked another step forward in our commitment to our vision of Educating for Tomorrow, as UA continuously seeks to understand and remain agile in changing landscapes, equipping all learners to meet the needs of tomorrow.

One of our most significant milestones this year was achieving CAIS accreditation, the culmination of three years of focused effort. This rigorous process validated our mission and our programs, confirming that UA meets the highest standards of independent school excellence. This achievement affirms UA's place among Canada's top schools and creates new opportunities for collaboration that will benefit both our students and faculty.

Our academic program remains the cornerstone of our success. Throughout all divisions, we celebrated outstanding achievements from foundational literacy to enriched mathematics and advanced studies. Our graduates once again earned acceptances to their top-choice post-secondary institutions. The Class of 2025 has chosen diverse and ambitious pathways that reflect their unique talents and aspirations. Their success is a testament to UA's integrated, relevant programs at every level, which encourage critical thinking and risk-taking.

Outside the classroom, our extracurricular life continues to thrive. This year, UA significantly expanded Outdoor Education opportunities, helping students build resilience and develop essential skills. Our Athletics program is flourishing, fostering teamwork through shared challenges. The Performing Arts continue to captivate and inspire on and off the stage. And finally, our rapidly growing Robotics program equips students with the tools to leverage technology for creative solutions, an outstanding example of future-focused education.



Our sense of community grew stronger this year, thanks to the efforts of our hard-working PAX. There were countless opportunities for connection, enriching every aspect of school life. A standout moment for me was participating in the dunk tank at the inaugural UA Carnival, a wonderful celebration of our collective spirit and togetherness.

The 2024/25 year was a testament to what we can achieve when we uphold high standards, embrace innovation, and nurture meaningful connections. We look forward to building on this extraordinary momentum into the 2025/26 school year.

*Mike Slinger*

**MIKE SLINGER**  
Head of School



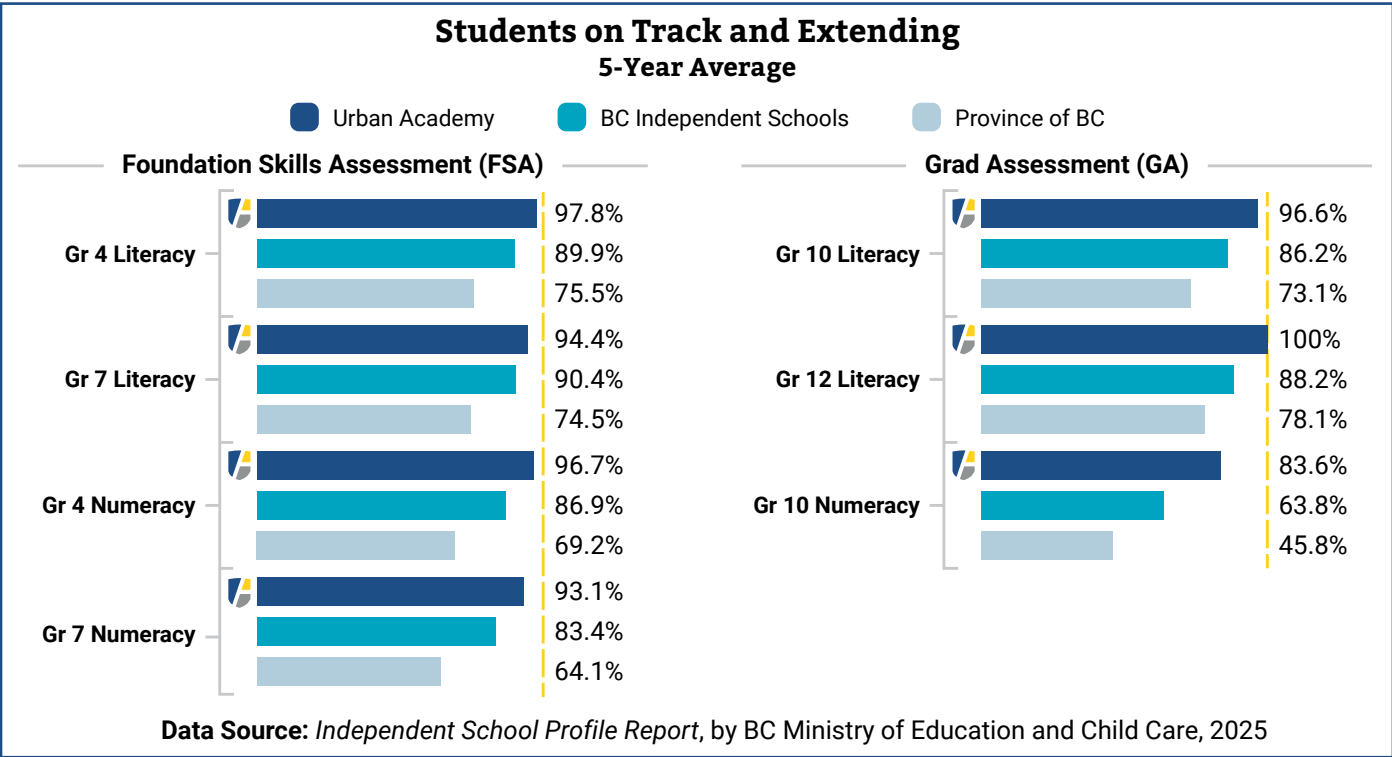


# STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: UA STUDENTS EXPLORED, ENGAGED & EXCELLED

When students are given opportunities to grow and thrive, the results are significant achievements across a range of academics and co-curricular opportunities. Over the 2024/25 school year, UA students achieved success across every domain!

## Academic Accomplishments

Student achievement begins with academic accomplishments. The foundation of the Urban Academy experience is rigorous academic excellence, and the latest data confirms our students continue to outperform provincial and independent school benchmarks significantly. The BC Ministry of Education conducts regular provincial assessments: Numeracy and Literacy through FSAs in Grades 4 and 7, and then Numeracy Assessments in Grade 10 and Literacy Assessments in Grades 10 and 12. UA recently received its Independent School Profile Report, which measures student performance on these assessments and compares results across the independent and public school peers. We are incredibly proud of our students, and the following results validate the strength of our K-12 trajectory.



These figures are a powerful testament to the quality of our teaching staff and the commitment of our students. We are exceptionally proud of their sustained success, which provides a strong basis for future learning.





### OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN LEADERSHIP AWARD

Middle School: Ayyan Datu  
Senior School: Eshaan Kirpal



### FINE & PERFORMING ARTS AWARD

Middle School: Elena Fazeli  
Senior School: Niviah McKenzie



### LIONS PRIDE ATHLETIC AWARD

Middle School: Raeya Kaila & Campbell Bryant  
Senior School: Maiya Lo & Jeffrey Xia

## Student Life Successes

Beyond pure academic results, UA students have also seen growth and achievement through an expansion of experiential learning and extracurricular involvement.

The spirit of competition and collaboration was alive and well in our athletics program, which saw a significant increase in student participation. Highlights included a standout season for the Middle School girls' soccer team, along with growing success and even some medals/trophies in volleyball and basketball.

Beyond sports, students flexed their intellectual muscles and saw some wonderful results through:

- ▶ Math Competitions
- ▶ Science Competitions
- ▶ Growing Chess Club
- ▶ Model UN
- ▶ Student Leadership Opportunities

There were some additional highlights that our students took part in, including a growing number of students taking part in an expanding AP program. Also, through the leadership of Mr. Douglas, UA hosted two of the first-ever ISABC Robotics Summits for middle school students, inviting ISABC robotics teams from across the region.

In the creative realm, new opportunities to showcase student learning in Art and ADST took place for our Grade 4 and 5 students, and months of preparation and skill development culminated in performing arts showcases for all ages.

## Expanding Our World

This year saw a greater number of students stretching their physical and cultural horizons. Students travelled internationally with the Grade 10–12 trip to Spain and Portugal, and a little closer to home, the Grade 8 and 9 trip to the Yukon, providing exposure to diverse cultures and environments.

In addition to regular camp opportunities, students also took part in the new Outdoor Ed opportunities, including Camp UA overnight in the gym for Grades 4 and 5, and Gibsons Farm Camp for Grades 6 and 7. With a challenging hike and overnight camping at the Stawamus Chief in Squamish, a group of Grades 8 and 9 students began laying the groundwork for the International Duke of Edinburgh's Award program.

Students were able to stretch and grow their skills with an incredible amount of experiential learning opportunities, largely due to the UA Activity Bus, as well as the new garden project next to the school, which became an invaluable living lab for all grades—a true hands-on experience in environmental science.

We could not miss sharing the successes of our graduates. The Class of 2025 were highly successful, with 92% of students receiving a post-secondary placement with their top choice school, and the balance at their second choice. Beyond these placements, they are a group of students who we know are going to be changemakers and contributors in the varied areas of study they have chosen.

It is evident that the achievements of the past year have led to both tangible results in the classroom and the development of courage and leadership in the wider world. We look forward to seeing what new heights our students will reach this school year!

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**MIKE SLINGER**  
*Head of School*



# TREASURER REPORT

The 2024/25 school year was marked by continued growth and financial resilience. Building on the stability of prior years, Urban Academy has further strengthened its foundation while advancing its mission of educational excellence. I extend my sincere appreciation to our teachers, school leadership, staff, parents, and students for their unwavering commitment to our community. The strength of our school lies in the dedication of each member, and I am honoured to serve alongside you.

## Financial Overview

Urban Academy's financial position remains robust. Our revenue streams, tuition, government grants, donations and auxiliary programs, have grown steadily. Total revenue for the year reached \$10.23 million, up from \$9.31 million in 2024. This increase was driven primarily by higher tuition and registration income (\$7.23 million) and expanded government support (\$2.35 million).

Our expenditures totalled \$10.43 million, reflecting strategic investments in faculty compensation, administration, and infrastructure. Notably, teachers' wages and benefits rose to \$5.33 million, underscoring our commitment to attracting and retaining top talent.

## Net Assets and Capital Investments

Our net assets grew slightly from \$3.14 million in 2024 to \$3.16 million in 2025. This growth reflects prudent financial management and targeted reinvestment in capital assets and debt repayment.



## Strategic Developments

A key milestone this year was the successful conversion of our construction term loan into long-term debt, simplifying our financial structure and improving predictability. We also continued to redeem and issue parent equity units, maintaining strong engagement with our parent community.

Our successful journey to CAIS accreditation helped guide improvements in governance, curriculum, and operations and has reinforced our commitment to excellence.

## Looking Ahead

As we approach full enrollment capacity, strategic financial planning becomes ever more critical. The Board and Staff are aligning long-term financial strategies with our updated strategic plan to ensure sustainable growth and continued investment in our programs and facilities.

In closing, I want to thank my fellow board members and the entire Urban Academy community for their support and collaboration. It has been a privilege to serve as Treasurer during this exciting chapter in our school's evolution.

With gratitude and optimism,

**STEVE CHEN**

*Treasurer 2024/25 School Year  
Year Ended June 30, 2025*





# GOVERNANCE & RISK COMMITTEE REPORT

The Governance & Risk Committee is a committee of the Board of Directors of Urban Academy established to support the school's commitment to strong, effective governance and proactive risk management. Its primary role is to ensure that the Board operates within a sound governance framework, fulfills its fiduciary responsibilities, and is equipped to anticipate and respond to risks that may impact the school's operations, reputation and/or strategic objectives.

On the governance side, the committee is responsible for:

- ▶ regularly reviewing and recommending updates to governance documents and various Board and school policies;
- ▶ keeping the Board of Directors apprised of Societies Act and other legislative changes that affect the school; and
- ▶ reviewing and advising on the Urban Academy Society bylaws;

and on the risk side:

- ▶ identifying and reviewing key organizational risks—financial, operational, reputational and strategic; and
- ▶ working with the school leadership to monitor mitigation strategies and ensure appropriate risk oversight structures are in place.

During the 2024/25 school year, the Governance & Risk Committee worked diligently to put together a committee handbook, reviewed and revised over 40 existing and new policies, suggested the drafting of a couple of new operational policies and supported good Board governance through the triennial review of the Urban Academy Society bylaws and the adoption of the Urban Academy Risk Appetite Statement.

**KIMBERLY GRANT**

*Chair, Governance & Risk Committee*

# BOARD DEVELOPMENT REPORT

As we conclude the year, I'm pleased to provide this summary of the work completed by the Board Development Committee.

## Key Accomplishments:

### 1. Board Education

We successfully coordinated two continuing education sessions for the Board. The first focused on **Advancement**, helping to align our understanding and approach to fundraising and external engagement. The second, **Governance 101**, offered a foundational refresher on governance roles, responsibilities, and best practices—particularly valuable for both new and continuing members.

### 2. Board Recruitment and Onboarding

We were pleased to welcome **Matt Hudson** and **Biyong (Anna) He** to the Board this year. Their respective backgrounds fill key gaps in **financial oversight** and **governance expertise**, supporting a more well-rounded and capable board. A structured onboarding process was implemented to ensure they felt welcomed and well-prepared to contribute meaningfully from the outset.

## Acknowledgements:

On behalf of the UA Community and Board, I would like to extend our sincere thanks to Harry Parmar, Wade Carson and Steve Chen for their dedication and thoughtful contributions over the past few years. Their insights and collaborative spirit have been instrumental in achieving both prudent financial judgement and our CAIS accreditation, which were major accomplishments over the 2024/25 school year.

With gratitude,

**HAFEEZ MERANI**

*Chair, Board Development Committee*



# FACILITIES REPORT

The 2024/25 academic year was defined by investments in our physical environment, focusing on strategic growth, long-term asset management and safety preparedness. These efforts ensure that Urban Academy's facilities remain safe, functional, and equipped to support our expanding student population and programs.

This year saw several high-impact projects designed to enhance the daily student and staff experience and support the school's growth trajectory:

- ▶ **Transportation Expansion:** We successfully purchased our UA Activity Bus, significantly enhancing our capacity to manage field trips, athletic travel, and off-site experiential learning opportunities. The bus has already undergone its annual mechanical inspection and is fully integrated into our operations.
- ▶ **Enhanced Student Support:** To better serve the emotional and academic needs of our students, we successfully built and outfitted a dedicated counsellor's office through the subdivision of the third-floor Student Services Room.
- ▶ **Rousseau House Outdoor Space:** The revitalization of the Rousseau House grounds was completed, featuring the planting and establishment of a new green space. We partnered with local experts to create a community garden space with automated irrigation, providing a valuable outdoor learning lab for students.
- ▶ **Facility Organization:** We added a new equipment shed on the 4th-floor deck, improving organization and access to maintenance resources.
- ▶ **Community Integration:** We welcomed the conclusion of the Wesgroup building construction behind us, which included the completion of the back lane and final landscaping of our property by Braid, positively impacting our school environment.



Maintaining the structural integrity and safety of our campus is our highest priority. This year, we took significant steps in both routine compliance and future-focused planning:

- ▶ **Emergency Preparedness:** A major initiative was refreshing 72 hours of emergency food and water supplies for the entire student body and staff, ensuring preparedness for any major, prolonged disruption.
- ▶ **Building Condition Assessment (BCA):** We commissioned a full Building Condition Assessment. This comprehensive review provides the foundation for our long-term maintenance strategy and is crucial for accurate financial planning regarding future capital needs of the building.
- ▶ **Critical System Inspections:** To ensure uninterrupted and safe operation, all required annual inspections were completed, including:
  - ▶ Full inspection of the main transformer and electrical systems.
  - ▶ Annual safety inspections for our fire suppression, elevator, HVAC, and water systems.

These operational measures, paired with our strategic capital investments, underscore UA's commitment to providing a secure and well-maintained environment for the UA Community.

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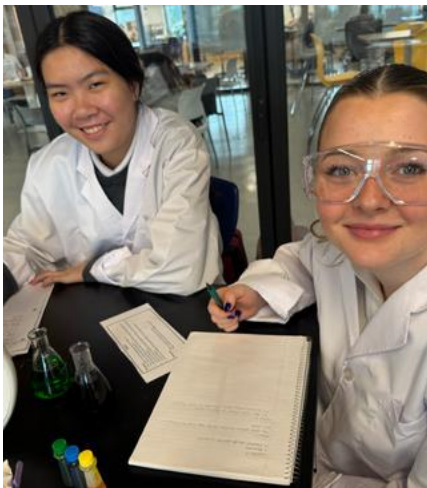
## DYLAN HAYDEN

*Director of IT & Infrastructure*

## MIKE SLINGER

*Head of School*







# COMMUNITY ADVANCEMENT REPORT

UA's vibrant learning atmosphere isn't an accident; rather, it's designed with intention and turned into reality with the incredible generosity of our families. Advancement, at its heart, is about a community that believes in our school's mission so much that they invest their time, talent, and treasure to make it come to life.

**The 2024/25 school year has been a wonderful year for these efforts, raising nearly \$300,000 altogether in advancement funds with a number of notable initiatives to celebrate.**

The year kicked off with our unforgettable, albeit damp, Golf Social, led by parents Jeremy Bekar and Karim Esmail—a perfect blend of fun and community building. From there, PAX, under the capable leadership of Tina Parmar, had a record-breaking year. PAX's efforts, from the parent socials to the seamless, newly weekly hot lunch program led by Lana Vijay and her team, not only created invaluable opportunities for connection but also raised considerable funds. With over \$50,000 raised, PAX saw an 88% increase in funds raised over the previous year, a testament to the dedication and teamwork of our parent volunteers.

The momentum didn't stop there. This year also saw the launch of a new signature event: the UA Carnival! Led by Tina Parmar and Suman Ghataurah, this huge initiative brought together more than 600 guests, including students, alumni, staff, families and friends. The fun, games, food and silent auction raised over \$30,000. Thank you to all of the parent leaders and volunteers who were able to make all of these parent-led initiatives happen!

In addition, our community's generosity shone through in the Annual Giving Campaign. Thanks to your donations and donations of Parent Equity Units, we surpassed our goal, raising over \$210,000 in gifts for the campaign. This collective generosity is a powerful statement of support and a direct investment in the heart of Urban Academy.

So, what does all this incredible support mean for students? This year alone, your contributions have funded:

- ▶ **Expanded Student Services Space:** The Student Services room on the third floor was renovated to include a new counsellor's office.
- ▶ **Enhanced Senior School Spaces:** To support our rapidly growing Senior School, we've added new common area furniture.
- ▶ **Equipped Spaces:** Two new sets of classroom furniture were added, in addition to enhancements in the UA Gym to improve function and add opportunities.
- ▶ **Additional Equipment:** Science, tech, athletic and media arts equipment added to enrich learning across the curriculum.
- ▶ **Improved Outdoor Spaces:** The Rousseau House outdoor space was redesigned to feature a bountiful garden to support in-class teaching, as well as a new basketball court, and space for the UA Bus.
- ▶ **Vital Safety Resources:** Your gifts also funded new emergency equipment and resources, ensuring our school remains a safe place for every student.
- ▶ **Investing in Our People:** Additional Professional Development for our teaching staff, bringing in speakers and trainers to ensure they are at the forefront of educational best practices.
- ▶ **Tuition assistance and scholarships** were well supported, reflecting our commitment to a diverse and inclusive community.

Your generosity fuels our mission to provide a well-rounded education, supporting a growing population and an ever-expanding number of extracurricular, student life, and leadership opportunities. Thank you for being such an integral part of this journey!

**SONJA KENNEDY**

*Director of Development*

## THANK YOU TO OUR 2024/25 CARNIVAL SPONSORS



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# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

<b>Community Leaders</b> .....	\$10,000+
<b>Community Innovators</b> .....	\$5,000–\$9,999
<b>Community Builders</b> .....	\$2,000–\$4,999
<b>Community Creators</b> .....	\$1,000–\$1,999
<b>Community Stewards</b> .....	\$300–\$999

## Community Leaders

Boustany Family      Dernisky Galler Family

## Community Innovators

Abdi Banihashemi Family	Henry Family	Li Yang Family	Wang Family
Choquette Family	Khaira Family	Luo Yu Family	Wang Lee Family
Du Cheung Family	Lamoureux Family	Parmar (HJ) Family	Ward Family
Ghataurah Family	Lewin Family	Tabesh Family	Weslowski Family
Hall Aitken Family	Li Wang Family	Vasselai Adriano Family	

## Community Builders

Ghiocel Family	Mann Saini Family	Qin Xie Family	Zhang Liu Family
Grant McCartney Family	Mottahed Family	Sandhu Family	Zhang Wu Family
Li Zhang Family	Ohashi Chen Family	Xu Xie Family	

## Community Creators

Begent-Connors Family	Han Zhao Family	Li Wang Family	Tang Zhang Family
Bhatia Family	Huang Cheang Family	Liao Juan Family	Tian Huo Family
Castellanos Fujimoto Family	Huang Lo Family	Ly Sit Family	Vijay Family
Chau Wong Family	Huang Ye Family	Narayan Kishore Family	Wang Downie Family
Ching Wong Family	Hung Pejovic Family	O'Brien Garfinkel Family	Wang Sun Family
Emelyanov Family	Kanji Family	Osborne Robertson Family	Yang Dai Family
Feng Choi Family	Karamali Amirali Family	Parmar (NT) Family	Zhang Family
Guo Family	Kennedy Family	Shen Cote Family	Zhang Sun Family
Guo Fan Family	Li Jaramillo Family	Sun Zhang Family	

## Community Stewards

Bae Takeuchi Family	Flood Family	Lalani Family	Wang Li Family
Bains Deol Family	Gaday Family	Liang Family	Wang Ni Family
Bansal Wong Family	Gao Kong Family	Lyu Duan Family	Wharram Family
Barkley Morriss Family	Gill Mahadevan Family	Mantri Family	Xiao Liang Family
Best Family	Guo Xia Family	McLean Robertson Family	Xu Ng
Bolton Sanderson Family	Hirani Kaderali Family	Minasyan Family	Xu Zhu Family
Boyer Family	Huang Lui Family	Nguyen Tran Family	Yang Chen Family
Brooke Family	Hui Wang Family	Nowson Gretton Family	Yao Zhang Family
Carson Family	Iwanaka Family	Samji Merani Family	Yeum Lee Family
Chan Hudson Family	Jiwa Manji Family	Shuang Zhang Family	Yu Wang Family
Chan Wong Family	Jiwa Mawani Family	Slinger Family	Zhang Shiu Family
Chow Chan Family	Jomori Walsh Family	Stevens Evans Family	Zhao He Family
Chui Li Family	Khan Family	Terepocki Grant Family	Zhou Chen Family
Datu Family	Kholdebarin Ellis Family	Velychko Sirotin Family	ZM Cao Zhang Family
Ding Zhao Family	Kirk Family	Venkatesh Suri Family	Anonymous (6)

*"Thank you to all of the parents who have led the multitudes of initiatives big and small."*

# ANNUAL GIVING

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February 28, 2026 / Hilton Metrotown

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- And A Walk Down Memory Lane •

SAVE  
THE  
DATE



PAX PRESENTS

## THE URBAN ACADEMY CARNIVAL

Saturday, April 11, 2026

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