A Strong Connection to His Students Keeps Brad Colbert PA ’06 Loyal to PALS

Just as the math segment of PALS expanded significantly in only one year—from 16 students and four math tutors in summer 2007 to 24 students and six math tutors this past summer—Brad Colbert has grown significantly, as well. In his introductory summers at PALS—in 2005 and 2006—he tutored eighth-graders in math and writing, developing, he says, a strong connection to his students. That connection has remained strong over the four years of Colbert’s participation in PALS.

In summer 2007, home from his freshman year at Duke University, he returned to PALS and was promoted to head of the eighth-grade mathematics program. His job was to oversee four tutors, develop lesson plans, coordinate the program, and hone the tutors’ teaching skills. Summer 2008 saw him continue in the math leadership role, supervising six tutors. He is so well respected as a teacher, he has advised on curriculum improvements for the after-school tutoring program that PALS runs in the winter. PALS Director Tom Cone calls Colbert “an exceptionally effective master teacher.”

A sport as unspectacular as table tennis brought Colbert’s attention to PALS. “My finest athletic achievement at PA was table tennis,” Colbert jokes. Both Cone and Colbert independently approached the Academy’s Student Activities Office asking to set up a table tennis club. The club became a reality, with Colbert its president and Cone its faculty advisor. Cone, sensing how capable Colbert was, offered him an internship at PALS. “I read the description of the program, and it sounded like fun—and it certainly was a good cause,” Colbert says.

He confirms that he “always did well in math and English” at Andover and had experience as a tutor in the Academy’s writing center. Sports were another matter. Although he has a black belt in Kung Fu and played soccer as a youngster, he concedes, “I’m kind of a small guy.” He put his efforts into wrestling, because, as he puts it, “The little guy can earn as many points as the big guy.” He became the wrestling team’s manager his senior year after injuries forced him off the mat.

Colbert grew up in Andover with his parents, older sister Allison ’01, and twin brother Matthew, a TV production major at Boston’s Emerson College. Matthew worked for PALS in summer 2006 shooting a film that can be viewed on the PALS Web site.

At Duke, Colbert is a public policy major currently studying overseas for the fall semester at the University of Glasgow in Scotland. It is his first trip abroad.

A confessed “big sports fan,” Colbert works in the Sports Information Office and the Sports Promotion Office at Duke and spends all his free time at various games, cheering the teams on. “I love being part of the whole atmosphere,” he says.

Colbert refers to PALS as a “springboard,” citing two of his former eighth-grade PALS students who now attend Phillips Academy. Of the program’s six math tutors this past summer, three were PALS graduates; one is currently a student at MIT, one is at Brown University, and one is at Providence College. “It is great to see that evolution,” he says, adding, “The greatest strength of the program is the one-on-one kids get with tutors.” An example Colbert cites is the 12-year-old student who could solve every algebra problem put in front of her, but when asked what time it was, she gave her tutor a blank stare. “She couldn’t read a clock,” Colbert relates. After that, the student spent one-on-one time with her tutor, who drew a big clock on the board and all summer long used equations involving a clock—adding time, subtracting time. “It’s great that tutors can ask the right questions, create a curriculum on the fly, and then tailor it to a particular student,” he says.

Colbert hopes his involvement with PALS is not over, although he suspects next summer he will probably be working in Washington, D.C., or Boston as a public policy intern. “My heart will be with PALS, and anything I can do to help them out I will. After you spend this long working with these kids, it’s hard to say no.”

—Paula Trespas
Dear Don,
Because of you...Kemi, Luz, Kenisha, Meekerley, Ziwe, three Carloses, four Sammys, five Miguels, and twenty score and ten other eager youngsters have nourished their minds, bodies, and spirits in the PALS program for nearly two decades.

They have mastered writing and math and have gained the courage to successfully enter high school, and, once there, they have covered themselves in academic and leadership glory. PALS students have succeeded consistently at Central Catholic High School, Presentation of Mary Academy, Notre Dame High School, St. John’s Prep, Lawrence High School Scholars Program, and Phillips Academy. Their very presence, including a Jack Kent Cooke Young Scholar, a Posse National Scholarship winner, and the first PALS valedictorian of Notre Dame High School, has strengthened these academic institutions tremendously.

Some of the country’s most outstanding colleges have offered PALS graduates—children of immigrants and immigrants themselves from Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cambodia, Guatemala, Cuba, and a dozen other nations—admission and their hard-earned degrees.

Don, working the magic of your fund-raising skills, you have given these hard-working Lawrence middle school students the chance to thrive, blossom, and succeed at one of the most critical times in a young person’s life. You have given community leaders and members of the greater Phillips Academy family the chance to underwrite this singular PALS enterprise. You have nurtured the connections with generous donors, allowing them to do great and measurable good.

More than 300 Phillips Academy and Andover High School students have learned the fine art and craft of teaching, a passion in so many cases. Without the underpinning of the financially secure program—one that you have obtained each year—the tutors and summer interns would not be able to serve our kids.

Don, you will be missed but not forgotten in this capacity. You have been so special because you have worked from your heart. So it is with gratitude, praise, and great affection that we, all your PALS, thank you today for your immeasurable service to the program.

At the same time, we welcome Scott Friedman to the PALS program as PA’s leadership gift officer for Educational Outreach. He comes to the Academy from Babson College, and prior to that he worked for seven years at Combined Jewish Philanthropies, Boston’s Jewish Federation. Scott will continue Don’s dedication and commitment to the PALS program and is thrilled to be working with such incredible people!

With deepest appreciation,

Tom Cone and Alix Driscoll

“I doubt I would have gotten accepted to Phillips Academy if I had not been a part of the PALS program. I feel that PALS is amazing.”

Luz Lopez
“You give us the opportunity that other kids don’t really have. You are preparing us for life in a very big way.”

Marc Ayala

Meekerley Sannon Strives for the Academic Payoff

Although Meekerley Sanon’s parents were part of the solid middle class in Haiti—her father was a well-respected university mathematics professor—her family left that troubled country in the 1980s because of growing political unrest. They joined many of the middle- and upper-class citizens who fled either to Canada, France, or the United States. Both Meekerley and her younger sister were born in Lawrence, Mass., where today her father is a computer technician and her mother is a nursing assistant.

Success stories about students in Lawrence, Andover’s multiethnic blue-collar neighbor, are not hard to find—you just have to search for them. Such success rarely occurs spontaneously. It has to be encouraged and nourished, and the student, like Meekerley Sanon, has to be hungry for it.

Sanon says she was never given the opportunity to “slack off,” either by her middle-school teachers at the Parthum School or when she reached Lawrence High School. “Teachers saw my potential, and they pushed me. It paid off later,” she says. “My parents encouraged me, too; attending college was an imperative, not an option.”

At first she balked at taking physics in high school—her favorite subjects were chemistry and calculus—but her teachers wouldn’t hear of it. She relented and ended up taking AP physics. Now in her second year at MIT as a brain and cognitive sciences major, she’s already taken two semesters of physics.

Sanon’s intelligence and academic drive led her teachers and her principal at the Parthum School to recommend her to the PALS program, beginning the summer before her seventh-grade year and continuing the following summer. In summer 2008 she was asked to be a math tutor. Tutoring comes somewhat naturally to Sanon. She had a paid position working with an autistic child in Lawrence for several years, and she tutored Lawrence’s Oliver School students to prep for the state-required Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test; she continues as an SAT tutor at a charter school in Cambridge.

“I find that I enjoy tutoring,” she says. “I am able to explain the subject in ways the kids can understand.” As a PALS student, she took introductory trigonometry. As a PALS tutor, she taught it herself last summer. “It was a bit daunting at first,” she reports. “I hadn’t seen the material in awhile.” But she grew more confident as the summer progressed. She feels she left her students with the ability to, as she puts it, “go out and conquer.”

Sanon’s supervisor this past summer was Brad Colbert (see page 1), the head of the PALS math program. Colbert was enthusiastic about Sanon’s teaching skills: “Meekerley is a straight-shooter. She is confident in her abilities and not afraid to speak her mind. She’s great with the kids because they really listen to her, both out of respect and because she understands first-hand what they’re going through. She’s an excellent role model and a joy to work with.”

Sanon says the PALS learning experience extends beyond the classroom and onto the school bus. “It’s cool for the tutors who live in Lawrence to ride home on the bus with the kids,” she says. “They are constantly asking questions about high school, about college, about life in general. It’s a great give and take.” She got to know the students she tutored better, as well. “It makes for an improved classroom experience because they’re more comfortable with you,” she says.

Sanon says she put off accepting MIT’s offer of admittance until two weeks before classes started. Prior to that commitment, she contemplated going to pharmacy school. “I didn’t want to be an engineer or a mathematician,” she says, “so why should I go to MIT?” But now that she there, she’s planning to stay. “It’s wonderful, and I’m doing very well,” she acknowledges. “I love everything about it.”

Her conversation is often punctuated with hoots of laughter, and she admits to being outgoing and easy-going, but realistic. “I see things as they are and try to work around the tough parts.”

Her future plans, she says, include either conducting medical research or “something to do with secondary education, like maybe working as a guidance counselor.” Spoken like a true PALS graduate.

—Paula Trespas

A PALS student in 2001 and 2002 and a PALS teaching intern the summer of 2008, Meekerley Sannon is currently a sophomore at MIT.
The Class of 2008 and Their Student-Teachers

Miguel Arias has enrolled at Central Catholic High School as a recipient of Adelante and Montagne Project scholarships. His student teacher was Mike Qin, AHS ’08, now in his first year at the University of Michigan.

Rachael Blanchard is now a freshman at Central Catholic High School. Her mentors were Naveen Kanthavelan, AHS ’08, and Dacone Elliott, PA ’08, who is now enrolled at Penn State.

Patricia Cepeda is attending the Math, Science & Technology School at Lawrence High School. She was tutored by Iha Haul, AHS ’10, and John Koo, AHS ’08, who is now a freshman at New York University.

Elizabeth Cruz is also a Math, Science & Technology School scholar at Lawrence High School. She, too, was tutored by Iha Haul and John Koo.

Leila Fabre has enrolled at Central Catholic High School. Her tutors were Naveen Kanthavelan, AHS ’09, and Stefani Shin, AHS ’08, who is currently enrolled as a freshman at Syracuse University.

Josephine Garcia is now attending Notre Dame High School. Ashleigh Baker, Josephine’s tutor, attends Andover High School and is a member of the Class of 2009.

Luz Lopez, a Jack Kent Cooke Young Scholar, is enrolled at Phillips Academy. She was tutored by Alexa Rahman, PA ’08, who is now a freshman at Harvard.

Shanice Madera currently attends Presentation of Mary Academy. Her mentor for the summer was Simon Ye, AHS ’08, who is now enrolled at Stanford University.

Davianne Marte presently attends Notre Dame High School. She was tutored by Ali Fessler, AHS ’09.

Kenisha McFadden is attending Noble & Greenough School. Alexa Rahman, PA ’08, was her tutor.

Jennifer Navichaque attends Lawrence High School’s Math, Science & Technology School. She was tutored by Rachel Wise, AHS ’08.

Orquidia Paulino has enrolled at Central Catholic High School as a recipient of Adelante and Montagne Project scholarships. Her student teachers were Tianyi Chen, AHS ’08, and Simon Ye, AHS ’08.

Carolina Santo also enrolled at Central Catholic High School as a recipient of Adelante and Montagne Project scholarships. She was mentored by Ali Fessler, AHS ’09, and Nkem Oghedo, PA ’08.

Dalin Sim is enrolled at Notre Dame High School and was tutored by Turraloy Johnston and Arianna Van Sluytman, PA ’08, who is now attending St. Francis. Dalin won a scholarship to Notre Dame and now works as a designer for a “green” high tech engineering firm in Andover for her internship.

Sabrina Tavarez is a freshman at Lawrence High School. She had two student teachers, Naveen Kanthavelan, AHS ’09, and Dacone Elliott, PA ’08.

Nicole Villar attends Phillips Academy. Her tutor was Alexa Rahman, PA ’08.
“I really liked how welcoming, pleasant, and friendly the PALS interns were. They worked with me on what I needed the most help with until I understood it.”

Randall Correa

PALS Class of 2004
(partial listing, as of September 2008)

Melissa Acevedo, Notre Dame High School ’08, Bay State College

Franchelly Acosta, Lawrence High School ’08, undecided

Jamie Adames, Central Catholic High School ’08, Valencia Community College–Florida

Elizabeth DelaCruz, Presentation of Mary Academy ’08, undecided

Francisco Hernandez, Haverhill High School ’08, Middlesex Community College

Elizabeth Francis, Presentation of Mary Academy ’08, University of Massachusetts–Amherst

Alfredo Gil, Central Catholic High School ’08, University of Hartford

David Ige, Central Catholic High School ’08, Amherst College

Ruben Jimenez, Haverhill High School ’08, undecided

Natalie Marte, Central Catholic High School ’08, Union College

Rawilda Mejia, Presentation of Mary Academy ’08, Middlesex Community College

Edward Nunez, Notre Dame High School ’08, Northeastern University

Seyi Obasa, Central Catholic High School ’08, University of Massachusetts–Amherst

Marlene Paulino, Presentation of Mary Academy ’08, Bay State College

Pablo Paulino, Lawrence High School ’08, Middlesex Community College

Miriam Sanchez, Notre Dame High School ’08 (Valedictorian), Fairfield University

Chrislenny Ynfante, Methuen High School ’08, undecided

Jonette Zephir, Lawrence High School ’08, undecided

Parent Update

For the third consecutive summer, PALS has reached out to the families of its students to help them better understand the many choices their youngsters have for secondary schools. This past year, Director Tom Cone and eighth-grade master teacher Alix Driscoll invited parents and family members to two evening workshops where they presented high school options and explained the application process.

The parents discovered that their children have many high schools from which to choose, including several local Catholic schools and local prep schools, as well as the option of taking honors classes at the new Lawrence High School. They learned how complicated the process is—not the completion of the application process and entry exams, but understanding tuition rates and the scholarship programs available to their children. Cone and Driscoll helped the parents to make sense of their many options.

The response from parents and family members was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. They found that they could better understand the challenges and opportunities before their children and support them in this crucial eighth-grade year. All agreed it was very worthwhile. In addition, the parents chatted with teachers at the final picnic and Cone held frequent “bus stop chats” with families on many mornings.

Moving forward, the program will be providing eighth-grade students and their families invaluable information regarding the high school application process via weekly e-mails.
News About PALS
Grads and Tutors

Miriam Sanchez '04 was first valedictorian of the first graduating class of Notre Dame High School in Lawrence. She is studying psychology at Fairfield University.

Natalie Marte '04 won a prestigious national scholarship from the Posse Foundation to attend Union College. She graduated from Central Catholic High School in 2008.

Brenda Marvin, PALS tutor for the academic years 1996–1998, received a master's degree in higher education from Boston College and works with the Merrimack College math and science tutoring program for Adelante students. PALS has had a strong collaboration with the Adelante program for many years.

Ziwe Fumadoh '06 returned to teach seventh-graders this past summer. She is an upper at Phillips Academy where she is an extraordinary actor.

Sebastian Dalby '06 taught math to seventh-graders this past summer. He is a lower at Phillips Academy where he plays football and lacrosse and wrestles.

Andy Frishman '93, a Phillips Academy graduate and past PALS tutor, finished his administrative credentials at California State University–Sacramento which focused on urban education. He is interested in the new Big Picture schools and has been doing some consulting work for the Big Picture Network in the United States, Australia, and the Netherlands.

Finnuala Kelleher, PALS tutor from 1996 to 1997, is now a lawyer with the United States Justice Department in Washington, D.C.

Bobela Tess, a former PALS intern, graduated from Bates College and pursued a professional career in several financial institutions. She is currently living in Connecticut where she and her husband are expecting their first child this winter. She is the aunt of current PALS eighth-grader Burina Vann.
“I loved talking to the interns, and the bus rides home were filled with enthusiasm and fun. All the interns and the students would laugh and talk to each other like we were brothers and sisters.”

Jazmin Medina-Morales
“In the two years I have been involved with PALS I have become more responsible and learned qualities that will benefit me in high school.”

Kenisha McFadden

PALS Newsletter

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Editor: Scott A. Friedman and Nancy McCormack

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Established in 1988, PALS is a two-year program operated by Phillips Academy in close collaboration with Andover High School, the Lawrence Public Schools, and other neighboring high schools. It annually serves approximately 40 academically capable students from the Leonard and Parthum middle schools in Lawrence, Mass., many from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Through an intensive four-week summer program and follow-up mentoring during the school year, PALS provides enrichment in math and language arts in preparation for high school and careers.

We gratefully acknowledge our 2007–2008 donors, whose generous contributions once again supported 100 percent of the PALS operating budget. Your investment in deserving youngsters in Lawrence nourishes vital hope for the future. The opportunities you provide and the doors they open for so many will have a lasting impact beyond anything we might imagine.

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Franklin D. Segall, MD, and Stephanie Bernstein, MD
Theodore R. and Nancy Sizer
Bob and Betty Smallridge
Sylvia L. Thayer ’54 and J. Philip Zaeder
Jeff C. Woodhead ’84

Gifts-in-Kind

Greg Wilkins: 8 tennis racquets
Students of Shawsheen School: stuffed animals
Lawrence Public Schools: transportation support

“I grew more from PALS, and, due to PALS, I want to strengthen my community and my school.”

Carolina Santos