

The Public Schools of Brookline  
School Committee Meeting of Thursday, March 16, 2017  
Superintendent Report  
Andrew J. Bott  
Superintendent of Schools

***Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) Scholars***

On March 9, a group of MSAN Scholars - including Hassan Abdirahman, Yama Estime, Salam Kasu, Jimmy Ricks, Sabrina Zhou and Angelica Woodson - met with our K-8 Math Curriculum Coordinator, Kathleen Hubbard, Anthony Meyer and me. During the meeting, our MSAN scholars shared their own experiences, in particular with a system of differentiated middle grade math instruction that was developed and implemented several years ago. Students explained that this did not feel like differentiation, but rather felt like a system which labeled and grouped students in ways from which they could not break out. Students felt that they did not know why they were chosen for certain groups or given certain work, and that they were not given clear goals for their work or measures of success. Because of these experiences, students did not feel they had the same opportunities as other students and that these experiences impacted their ability to access higher level math in high school.

In response to this discussion, the following immediate next steps will take place over the next several weeks:

- On April 5, grade 7-12 math teachers are coming together from 1:00 to 3:00 pm. High School math coordinator, Josh Paris, has arranged for Erica Walker, a professor at Teachers College at Columbia University, to present to all Brookline 7-12 math educators at this time. Dr. Walker has written several books on math education and racial identity and will speak to the importance of (1) developing a strong math identity at a young age and (2) building spaces in support of that development.
- Share the experiences of the MSAN Scholars with all grade 6-8 math educators within the context of district-wide math equity. This work will specifically focus on the differentiated materials developed many years ago, with our team of educators working to address the unintended but real outcomes of these materials on students and student learning. Combined with our ongoing work with Jo Boaler's Mathematical Mindsets and NCTM's Principles in Action, we believe this will be a powerful step in ensuring all students are challenged and supported in math.
- Invite our MSAN scholars to present to all Brookline principals.

***Lawrence School Principal Search Process***

As you know, Lawrence School principal Warren Blair announced last week that he is resigning his position effective at the end of June. His departure is unexpected; his elderly parents need his assistance back home in Denver. We will miss his leadership at Lawrence School.

We have embarked on a search process for a new leader of Lawrence School. The position is posted, meetings with parents and staff have been scheduled, a Search Committee is being created (to include parents, teachers and administrators) and a leadership profile is being developed. The complete timeline of the search process is attached for your information. Our goal is to identify a new Lawrence School principal by May 11.

***Runkle Principal Transition***

Genteen Jean-Michel will be at Runkle School all day tomorrow for meetings with staff and parents. Large group and small group meetings are planned throughout the day, as well as tours and introductions. I will be joining Genteen at Runkle tomorrow to assist in her transition. We will also be scheduling a time in the next few weeks for Genteen to attend a Runkle faculty meeting, and I look forward to introducing her to the School Committee in the near future.

### ***School Visits***

Since the last School Committee meeting, I have been able to visit classrooms at Pierce, Heath, Baker and Lincoln Schools.

At Lincoln School, Principal Brian Denitzio and I had the opportunity to visit a 7<sup>th</sup> grade history class in which students were completing research projects on ancient civilizations. In conversations with students, they were able to explain the factors influencing successful battles in the Peloponnesian War. We spent time in a 7<sup>th</sup> grade English Class where students were discussing with one another the symbolism in the epic poems of Gilgamesh and Beowulf, both being read by students in the class. We visited a 6<sup>th</sup> grade English class where students were building plot charts, focusing specifically on the craft used by the author in building to the climax of the story. Additionally, we spent time in an 8<sup>th</sup> grade science class where students were reviewing all that they had been learning about climate science. In some individual discussions that I had, students were able to explain the ways that climate forces interact and how climate change might affect these interactions. Lastly we were able to observe in a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classroom in which, through the creative and effective scheduling of educators, three focused literacy groups were meeting with the remainder of students engaged in either independent reading or independent writing work.

At Baker School, Vice Principal Joshua Howe and I visited several 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes, 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and most of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade classes. First grade students were deeply engaged in a variety of challenging math centers, supported by both the teacher and the paraprofessional. In one 1<sup>st</sup> grade class, students shared with me what they had just learned about robots - and demonstrated their learning by explaining how an actual robot moved across images that students themselves created. Fourth grade students were engaged in substantive creative writing, and at the time of my visit were giving each other specific feedback on ways to improve their writing. The level of detail and specificity of the feedback was impressive, and each bit of feedback I heard would, if included in a revision, have significantly improved the piece of writing.

At Heath School, Dr. AC Sevelius and I were able to visit a number of classes, beginning with a 1<sup>st</sup> grade in which students were working in math centers, differentiated to support all learners and highly engaging for everyone in the class. We then observed 6<sup>th</sup> grade students who were using Minecraft to recreate historically accurate representations of Inca, Maya and Aztec villages. Continuing with 6<sup>th</sup> grade, we then observed sixth grade math where students were all engaged in very rigorous and challenging material, supported throughout the lesson by the classroom teacher and paraprofessional working in small groups and individually with students. Also of note was the time I was able to spend in an 8<sup>th</sup> grade science class where students were working on a collaborative art/science project based on the work of Leonardo Da Vinci. Mr. Goldner (science) and Ms. Yahn (art) have worked together to bring this exciting project to life. Inspired by a field trip to the Da Vinci exhibit at the Museum of Science, students designed and built their own devices using simple machines. In art, students created monotype and altered prints using drawings and sketches they made while at the Da Vinci exhibit. You can see examples of this work on twitter @sciencegold and @YahnArt. We have spoken in discussions about the BHS education plan about collaborative work at the high school. I share this as a powerful example of this same type of cross-curricular, collaborative work taking place in our PK-8 schools.

On Wednesday, March 8, all of our PK-8 principals and Deputy Superintendent Nicole Gittens joined Headmaster Anthony Meyer on a learning walk at Brookline High School. The schedule for this visit is attached to this report. As you can see from the number of classes visited, this learning walk gave our PK-8 team the opportunity to observe the diverse, engaging and strong course offerings at Brookline High School. This was an important step in building a deep understanding of our collective work PK-12, and I look forward to many more opportunities for our PK-8 team to continue learning about the work happening at BHS.

### ***Boys to Men Retreat***

I had the pleasure of attending the annual Brookline METCO *Boys to Men Retreat* at Emmanuel College last week. Suzie Talukdar, METCO Director, and Keith Lezama, coordinator of METCO at BHS, scheduled a full day of engaging workshops for our students. I was impressed with the thoughtful and reflective senior panel, at which BHS seniors presented to BHS freshmen and sophomores about their experience in high school, what they know now as seniors that they wish they had known as freshmen, and what they would do differently if they had the chance to change something from the last four years. BHS seniors providing insight and guidance was incredibly powerful for all in attendance. I want to

thank Dr. Talukdar, Dr. Lezama, BHS teachers Ms. Stephanie Hunt and Mr. Keith Thomas, and African American Latino Scholars Project coordinator Dr. David Lemmel for their leadership in planning this incredible day.

***Brookline Education Foundation 5th Grade Spelling Bee***

The BEF hosted their annual spelling bee for Brookline's 5th grade students on Sunday, March 12 in the Brookline High School auditorium. Alana Cummings from Driscoll School bested her peers by spelling "fuchsia". Congratulations to Alana, and to all of the 5th graders who participated!