



**The Public Schools of Brookline**  
Town Hall  
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**Ben Lummis**  
Interim Superintendent

September 16, 2019

Dear Families,

As you may have learned, students across the country are planning a Climate Strike on Friday, September 20, 2019. A number of PSB students have approached their teachers and school leaders to inform them of their intention to participate in this action.

To help our schools prepare for the possibility of a student walkout, I have shared the following information with our principals who will be sharing it with our school-based staff. At this time I want to share it with you, as well.

We are providing guidance in four areas:

- Schools can use this protest as a teachable moment
- Schools should provide a safe space for any student who chooses to gather and protest while ensuring that learning continues for all students who choose not to participate
- Any student who chooses to leave school grounds must be excused by a parent or guardian and may only leave school grounds when accompanied by a parent or guardian
- Schools need to provide a learning environment that is as free as possible from coercion, peer pressure, or pressure to conform to another individual's views

**This is a teachable moment.**

As our mission says, our schools have the responsibility to “ensure that every student develops the skills and knowledge to participate thoughtfully in a democracy.” As the date of the climate strike approaches, there are a number of critical lessons that we can help students learn about, including:

- student First Amendment rights, specifically as they pertain to free speech and peaceful assembly
- the balance between individual rights and responsibilities in a democracy
- the history of political movements in the United States that have included mass protests
- strategies designed to affect legislative change in addition to walkouts and political protests such as advocacy techniques and lobbying
- teaching about climate change, the risk it poses to our earth, and what can be done about it

**We will provide a safe space for any student who chooses to participate in the protest as long as they remain on school grounds.**

I have asked each school to designate a specific space for students to assemble safely outside of the school where they can be properly supervised at all times. Our staff cannot be responsible or stay with any students who choose to leave school grounds. If you want your student to leave school grounds during the day, you must follow our typical procedures for early dismissal by calling your school and letting them know you will be taking your student off of school grounds. Any student who leaves school grounds should be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

**We will ensure that learning continues for all students who choose not to participate.**

Schools will ensure that lessons will continue for students who choose to remain in class and that all students will be supervised.

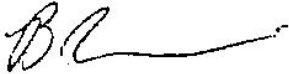
**Schools need to provide a learning environment that is as free as possible from coercion, peer pressure, or pressure to conform to another individual's views.**

It is essential that our schools maintain a culture that allows for and respects divergent viewpoints and where no one feels coerced or pressured to conform to views that are not their own. As public employees within the Public Schools of Brookline, our staff will neither encourage nor discourage student participation in a walkout. Whether or not any student decides to participate in any action should be their own choice and not be influenced by peers, a teacher, or other staff members. Educators are, however, encouraged to answer student questions as they decide the course of action they may take on September 20.

We are one school district, but we are also eight individual K-8 schools, one high school, and one early education program. We always aim to strike a balance between school autonomy and district-wide coherence. We hope you recognize that in a case such as this, there will be some variation in how each school plans for and approaches the September 20 Climate Strike. I am confident that no matter how each school plans and responds, it will be done in a caring, age-appropriate manner that supports the learning of all students.

If you feel it is appropriate for their age level, I encourage you to talk with your child(ren) about this important issue. If your student plans to participate in the walkout, please review the information above with them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'BL', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ben Lummis  
Interim Superintendent