

THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF BROOKLINE
OFFICE OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE
BROOKLINE, MASSACHUSETTS

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LEGISLATOR UPDATE AND 2024 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

We welcome you to the annual Brookline School Committee Meeting with Legislators. We greatly appreciate your steadfast and ongoing leadership and partnership in support of the school district.

We are pleased to report that the Public Schools of Brookline has enjoyed another successful year since we last met. One particular highlight we would like to share is the creation and adoption of a Strategic Plan for the Public Schools of Brookline. Developed under Superintendent Guillory's leadership, with the robust participation of a representative Community Planning Team, the Strategic Plan is the result of the collaborative work of many stakeholders in the district. The Strategic Plan is a living document that will guide district priorities, initiatives, and budgeting decisions in the coming years.

Voters across the Town of Brookline demonstrated their support for Public Schools of Brookline at the Town Election on May 2, 2023. In order to address a structural deficit (the result of fixed costs rising faster than recurring revenues due to the constraints of property tax growth under Proposition 2 ½), voters approved an operating override for the FY 2024 budget. The override provides \$6,998,367 in additional funding to the school district, phased in over three years. We are deeply appreciative of the Town's residents who voted to support this important override.

We are grateful for your support of the extension of Open Meeting Law provision that allows public officials to participate remotely in meetings, through at least March 31, 2025. Remote participation in public meetings allows for equitable access to participation in municipal government, especially among those for whom in-person attendance is not always possible. We also thank you for your efforts to ensure that funds from the Fair Share Amendment are allocated to public school districts.

Brookline continues to be busy with school building projects:

- On December 4, 2023, school and municipal leaders, parents and caregivers, teachers and students, all celebrated the opening of the new Driscoll School on Washington Street. The celebration followed the full occupancy of the school on October 30, 2023. Demolition of the old Driscoll School is underway, after which the construction of the new playground on the site will represent the final piece of this exciting project. The project features geothermal HVAC along with photovoltaics to bring the school close to net zero. Faculty, students and families are all grateful for this state-of-the-art learning space.
- Voters in the May 2023 Town Election approved a debt exclusion override to fund the renovation of the Pierce School, and other site improvements including renovations and additions to the historic Pierce School Building facing Pierce Street, which dates to 1855; reconstruction and repair of the park across School Street; and reconstruction and repair of the Town Hall and Pierce School garages underneath the 1973 Pierce School building. The new school will have the capacity to educate approximately 725 K-8 students in a four-section, fully Americans with Disability Act-compliant building. The new Pierce School will also contain three classrooms for preschoolers in the Brookline Early Education Program, known as BEEP. The Public Schools of Brookline is partnering with the Massachusetts School Building Authority to fund this project. We are incredibly grateful to the Town's voters for their support of the Pierce School Project.

Brookline School Committee

2024 Legislative Priorities

1. Support for school-based early childhood programs. As a Prek-12 school district, we are an integral part of the mixed delivery system for early childhood programs and care. Systems to better support public school districts to access early education funding must be developed so that Massachusetts can reach the goal of universal, high-quality preschool access for four-year-olds. For example, in Brookline, we provide scholarships to low-income residents to enable their participation in our preschool programs. A grant program to subsidize the cost of those scholarships would be beneficial for the school district. The current system of early childhood vouchers does not work for public school district.

2. Universal Free School Meals: We greatly appreciate that Governor Healey has reaffirmed her commitment to universal free school breakfast and lunch programs, and we ask that this critical program be fully funded to best serve the needs of students throughout the Commonwealth.

3. Support for Governor Healey's Proposed Literacy Launch

We support Governor Healey's proposed Literacy Launch program, specifically its focus on professional development and educator coaching, and strongly endorse new funds for school districts to implement high-quality literacy instruction.

4. Full, stable funding for METCO: We are in support of full, stable funding for METCO. We unanimously supported the Massachusetts Association of School Committee's (MASC) resolution, calling on the Governor to create a stable funding structure to support METCO and its partner districts that fully funds the support provided by METCO, and the cost of providing services delivered by METCO's partner districts.

5. Support for the Municipal Empowerment Act: We support the Municipal Empowerment Act, as announced by Governor Healey, which will, among other things, provide the Town of Brookline with more flexibility to raise revenue through hotel, meals and excise taxes.

6. MCAS: We support efforts to eliminate MCAS as a graduation requirement, either through legislative action or a ballot question. The Brookline School Committee unanimously supported the Massachusetts Association of School Committees' (MASC) resolution calling for a wider, more consensus-built strategy for an evaluation system with input from legitimate stakeholders; urging the Legislature to launch a comprehensive evaluation to investigate the extent of biases pertaining to MCAS testing and make those results public; urging Massachusetts to enact a moratorium on MCAS testing immediately; and urging Massachusetts to develop an alternative to the high-stakes MCAS tests.

7. Chapter 70 Funding: We appreciate the school district's Chapter 70 funding in FY24 (\$16,035,247), and the preliminary funding expected for FY25 (\$16,242,217). We advocate for increased funding for this critical local aid.

8. Support for Senate Bill No. 309, An act establishing a Special Commission to review the adequacy and equity of the Massachusetts school building program: The Public Schools of Brookline greatly appreciates the work of the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). We have successfully partnered with the MSBA on significant school building projects, including the recent Ruffin Ridley School project and the current Pierce School project. We are grateful for the Legislature's work to increase the reimbursement rate on school building projects (to more accurately reflect current and inflationary construction costs); for the Pierce School project, the adjusted rate increases the maximum reimbursement to the Town of Brookline by over \$7.5 million (from \$37,839,511 to \$45,403,459). We join with our partners in the Brookline Educators Union in supporting Senate Bill 309, which will enhance the MSBA's work and allow them to fund 21st century solutions to meet the needs of current and future school facility projects. The bill will also investigate and recommend the extent to which current state funding for the authority may need to be increased.

9. Full funding for the Student Opportunity Act: Federal COVID stimulus funding has made it possible for the legislature to fulfill its commitment to Chapter 70 and incremental adjustments to charter school mitigation, regional transportation funding, and special education transportation. We urge the legislature to continue that commitment, and to advocate for additional funds at the state level as the federal ARPA monies expire but the need continues to cover the extraordinary costs of services to children still recovering from the pandemic. (MASC)

10. Further fund Special Education: We appreciate the additional funding we have received for Special Education transportation. In addition, we continue to lobby for full funding of Special Education costs, along with maximum Circuit Breaker reimbursement and insurance participation for medically necessary treatment in school (for example, 1-on-1 nurses).

11. Electric Bus grants or subsidies: We would like your support to identify funding for a pilot for Brookline. There apparently was a pilot program for 3 communities in 2018.