

Public Schools of Brookline
DRAFT LEGISLATOR UPDATE AND LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES 2023

There have been changes in the PSB since we met last January. Superintendent, Dr. Linus Guillory, completed a successful first year, including the ratification of the BEU contract for Units A and B through 2026. We have negotiations for the Paraprofessionals this year. Dr. Guillory is currently hiring for several senior staff. Our student population is again growing although we are not back to our pre-pandemic levels. Staff, students, and families are delighted to be back to a “close to normal” school year with many traditions and gatherings reinstated.

COVID is no longer a driver of PSB operations, supported by our strong vaccination rates for our age-eligible students (~90%) as well as staff. We have agreements with all of our unions that everyone working in PSB be vaccinated. We are addressing continuing academic and mental health impacts of the pandemic, which are a national challenge, through social-emotional curriculum, newly hired social workers, an additional school nurse, and working with students to address any academic deficits caused by remote learning.

Brookline continues to be busy with school building projects:

- The BHS additions and renovations are nearing completion. We now have a new STEM wing in the Main Building, a partial renovation of the Tappan Gym, a new MBTA station, and a new 9th grade building. We are completing work on the quad and the conversion of old science labs to general education classrooms. Street and sidewalk renovations will be completed this summer. These projects will serve the High School population well for a long time. You are invited to arrange a tour of the facilities if you have not yet done so.
- The Driscoll School began construction last summer and is progressing well. We were successful in getting Town Meeting to fund geothermal HVAC along with photovoltaics for this project to bring the school close to net zero. The scheduled occupancy of the building is fall 2023.
- The Pierce School project has finished feasibility and selected a Preferred Schematic Design. We are now awaiting MSBA Board approval of the funding agreement. The vote comes to the Board on December 21, 2022. We are also planning on this building being as close to net zero as possible taking into consideration that we are reusing the Pierce historic building. The town wide debt exclusion vote is expected to be on the May ballot.

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- 1. Fund Chapter 70 using 2019 enrollment:** We appreciate the level funding of Chapter 70 for FY22 (\$15,212,527) and are hopeful that Chapter 70 funding for FY23 continues to be level funded or increased. Reduced enrollment is a statewide problem. Our enrollment has increased slightly from last year, but is still down by nearly 700 students. Given the uncertainty of our enrollment forecast, particularly if/when international students will return, we will need support from the legislature to ensure our total Chapter 70 funding is maintained through a “hold harmless” provision that uses our October 2019 enrollment.
- 2. 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 oversee that commitment and to advocate for additional funds as the federal government may provide to cover the extraordinary costs of services to children during the pandemic. (MASC)
- 3. Further fund Special Education:** We appreciate the 25% funding for Special Ed transportation which for Brookline was given \$300,000. We hope next year will be increased to 50% as laid out in the Student Opportunity Act. 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 (e.g., 1-on-1 nurses).
- 4. Special Education Private Schools:** The Operational Services Division (OSD) of the Massachusetts Executive Office for Administration and Finance has set a 14% inflation rate factor for M.G.L. approved private special education program tuitions for purchase by cities and towns beginning July 1, 2023. This is a significant increase (historically under 2% annually), which will negatively impact districts’ FY 2024 budgets.
- 5. Universal Pre-K funding:** We recognize the importance of Universal Pre-K and ask for support in advocating for this funding.
- 6. Fair Share Amendment:** We would like to ensure that public education receives a significant portion of these funds. Do you have any information on the disbursements of these funds?
- 7. Electric Bus grants or subsidies:** We would like your support to identify funding for a pilot for Brookline. There apparently was a State pilot for 3 communities in 2018.
- 8. MCAS Moratorium:** We are grateful for the advocacy that led to minimized MCAS for the previous school year (2020-2021) and once again support the legislation put forward for a moratorium on MCAS testing.
- 9. Continued offsetting of COVID-related Expenses:** Funding for COVID-related expenses, while reduced, continues to be an ongoing expense. Items such as surveillance testing, summer remedial programs and PPE are just a few of the extraordinary costs we are experiencing. ESSER funds are helpful to offset this but if expenses continue past any Federal relief, we will need support from the legislature.

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10. Update Open Meeting Law: In light of the pandemic, the legislature should embark on a study to determine how the Open Meeting Law may be revised to meet the needs of local officials in the 21st century. Such reforms may include:

Continuation of remote participation in appropriate circumstances including statewide boards whose members may reside long distances from meeting sites, and accommodations of individuals with family caregiving responsibilities who may not be able to meet in person. (MASC)

11. Children’s Services Safety Net: We believe in funding for those agencies that support children and their families in need of essential social services and economic support. Schools alone cannot compensate for the threat of hunger, need for health care and mental health services, and the economic stimuli that provide income to families seeking work. We would like to see full funding for Universal School Meals and support for Child Tax Credit.

12. Continuing Needs: We thank you for your increased support for METCO, Steps to Success, and the Brookline Center for Community Mental Health. We appreciate it and hope that additional funding for these critical community programs will increase in the FY24 Budget.