

PSB Community Panel on Environmental Education

The effects of climate change present some of the most significant social and political challenges of our time. PSB students are well aware of this. A 2019 survey of nearly a thousand BHS students found that two-thirds of them believed that they should be required to learn skills to fight climate change. Further, climate anxiety among our students is increasingly a concern: 38.6% of survey respondents reported that news of climate change negatively affected their mental health, and 14.3% reported that their environmental concerns were so severe that they interfered with their ability to function normally at school.

Students, educators, and community members have launched some initiatives to fight climate change and advocate for climate justice. Schools have developed environmental education courses; established clubs, gardening, and composting programs; and conducted outdoor education activities. Community members have held events and summits; launched environmental education magazines and newspapers; and recruited volunteers to promote environmental stewardship through education and hands-on opportunities. However, these initiatives are uncoordinated, unaligned with any central objectives, and are dependent on enterprising individuals who launched them. They are not mainstreamed and institutionalized within PSB, and thus their full potential has not yet been realized.

This memo proposes a Community Panel on Environmental Education to assist the School Committee in determining how to support, coordinate, and institutionalize environmental education initiatives across the district.

Community Panel Mandate

Four Expert Advisory Panels supported PSB in adapting to remote and hybrid learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. These four panels were composed of volunteer community members and issued recommendations to the School Committee and central administration on the topics of educational excellence and equity; the whole child experience; remote learning capacity building; and public health, safety, and logistics. The fourth Expert Advisory Panel continues to provide PSB with evidence-based recommendations and is a model for leveraging community expertise in support of our public schools.

We propose a Community Panel on Environmental Education following the model of the previous four. (We have elected to call this a “Community” Panel rather than an “Expert

Advisory” Panel to acknowledge that much of the expertise in preparing PSB students rests with the educators and administrators who see them every day, and to emphasize the value of including the larger Brookline community in this initiative.) The definition of “environmental education” for this panel will be broad, encompassing education on sustainability, climate science, and climate justice. It is likewise not restricted to the classroom, and will consider initiatives in student health and wellness, food services, and operations and facilities, as well as teaching and learning.

The Community Panel will be composed of (a) **volunteers** from the district with demonstrated experience and expertise in environmental, sustainability, and climate education work; and (b) PSB **students** with a deep interest in these issues. The panel will be mandated to:

- 1) Survey and map existing environmental, sustainability, and climate education initiatives and assets across PSB;
- 2) Propose specific and viable environmental, sustainability, and climate education goals for PSB;
- 3) Propose metrics by which to measure PSB’s progress towards these goals, and to determine the promise and/or success of initiatives; and
- 4) Propose specific strategies, mechanisms, and actions that the School Committee can undertake or establish to help PSB attain the proposed goals.

The panel will issue a final report and deliver a presentation to the School Committee, Superintendent, and Deputy Superintendents within six months of launch.