

Brookline School Committee  
Meeting with Legislators  
Monday, February 12, 2024  
Brookline Town Hall, School Committee Room and Remote via Zoom  
4:00 PM – 5:40 PM

**Participants:**

**Legislators and Legislative Staff:** Congressman Jake Auchincloss; Senator Cynthia Stone Creem; Representative Tommy Vitolo; Representative Kevin Honan; Representative Ruth Balser; Representative Bill MacGregor; Dana Hanson, District Director for Congressman Jake Auchincloss; Brittany Webb, General Counsel for Senator Creem; Timothy Wilson, Legislative Aide for Representative Vitolo; Donnie Weisse, Communications Director for Representative Honan; Dmitriy Gridnev, Chief of Staff for Representative Balser; and Michael Giordano, Legislative Aide for Representative MacGregor (remote).

**School Committee Members:** David Pearlman (remote), Andreas Liu, Helen Charlupski, Suzanne Federspiel, Valerie Frias, Natalia Linos (remote), and Mariah Nobrega.

**Brookline Schools Administration:** Linus Guillory, Superintendent; Susan Givens, Deputy Superintendent for Administration & Finance; Claire Galloway-Jones, Senior Director of Educational Equity.

**Town of Brookline Administration:** Charles Carey, Town Administrator.

**Brookline Advisory Committee:** Harry Friedman, Dennis Doughty (remote), Perry Grossman, Ben Birnbaum (remote) and Carol Levin (remote).

Ms. Frias, Chair of the Government Relations Subcommittee, welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming, with particular thanks to our legislative delegation for their steadfast and ongoing leadership and partnership in support of the Public Schools of Brookline. She shared the following update with legislators.

### LEGISLATOR UPDATE

*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.*

Mr. Frias invited each legislator to spend a few minutes describing their recent legislative achievements and priorities. Representative Vitolo thanked the Committee for this annual opportunity to share goals and priorities. As the representative for the 15<sup>th</sup> Norfolk District, and as the parent of two children in Pierce School, he is a steadfast supporter of school district priorities and of the values of the broader Brookline community. His focus is on the issues of equity, education and the environment. Representative Honan represents the Allston and Brighton neighborhoods of Boston, and Brookline precincts 13 and 14A. He is the Chair of the House Committee on Steering, Policy and Scheduling. He spent 17 years as Chair on the Housing Committee, championing affordable housing protection and creation. He is a strong advocate for the METCO program, the West End House Boys and Girls Club, and Governor Healey's proposed Literacy Launch program. He recounted a recent visit of Baker School students to the State House, which was a big success. Representative Balser, who shared the news that she won't be seeking reelection in November 2024, represents precincts 5, 13A, 14 and 15 in Brookline (in addition to parts of Newton). She noted her strong support for local aid items such as Chapter 70, METCO, and Special Education. She is a clinical psychologist, so brings a focus on behavioral health issues to her legislative work, including social and emotional learning, mental health, and addiction issues. She looks forward to sustaining a keen focus on the work of her district through to the end of her current term. Senator Creem, a proud graduate of Brookline High School, thanked the Committee for the invitation to today's meeting, and expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to directly learn about the school district's priorities. Some of her priorities are

gun safety, climate and sustainability issues, the Raise the Age bill (which would gradually transition 18 to 20 years-olds to the juvenile justice system), and anti-bullying efforts. Her district includes the entirety of the Town of Brookline (in addition to Newton and Wellesley). She has several leadership roles in the Massachusetts Senate, including Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Global Warming and Climate Change. Representative MacGregor, newly elected in May 2023, represents Brookline's Precinct 16, in addition to parts of the Jamaica Plain, West Roxbury and Roslindale neighborhoods in Boston. He is a proud graduate of Driscoll School. Before being elected to the legislature he worked for Boston City Councilor O'Malley on environmental issues including a plastic bag ban and net-zero carbon building construction. He is a strong supporter of universal free school meals and the METCO program. U.S. Representative Auchincloss (who was able to briefly join the meeting between *House Select Committee on Competition with China* field hearings in Cambridge and Boston, and a flight back to Washington, D.C. before the impending snowstorm), expressed his appreciation for the invitation to today's meeting. He emphasized the importance of a strong education for our students, especially in STEM and literacy, so that they will be well-positioned for success in a competitive global economy. He shared information about three specific programs that might be of interest to the school district, including: the EPA Clean School Bus Rebate Program; the Inflation Reduction Act Tax Credits for School Facilities Energy Upgrades (including solar and geothermal systems, which the PSB hopes to access for the Pierce and Driscoll School projects); and the Complete Streets Act to support cities and towns to create safe pedestrian routes.

Ms. Charlupski noted that the geothermal system for the new Pierce School will be built under the Pierce Playground (the playground will be fully rebuilt after the geothermal system is installed). The geothermal project is supported by the Brookline Park and Recreation Commission. The construction of the geothermal system may trigger an Article 97 (Public Land Preservation Act) review. Rep. Balser offered to help arrange a meeting with staff in the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) to facilitate this important review process that, given that the playground will be returned to its original state, should not be overly burdensome.

Dr. Guillory shared the **2024 Legislative Priorities**:

**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 districts.

**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.

### **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.

**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.

**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. *Town Administrator Carey noted that the Massachusetts Municipal Association firmly endorses the Municipal Empowerment Act, as it allows cities and towns to diversify revenue away from real property.*

**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.

**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.

**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 appreciate 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 (BEU) in supporting Senate Bill No. 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. *BEU President Justin Brown noted that sustainably heated and cooled school buildings are critically important both for educators (to teach in a healthy environment) and for students (to learn in a healthy environment). The BEU is supportive of this bill because it will expand the MSBA's accelerated repair program to help retrofit older school buildings.*

**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)

**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).

**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.

The Legislators offered their continued support to the Town of Brookline and the Public Schools of Brookline. Ms. Frias thanked everyone for attending the meeting, and for their work on behalf of Brookline's students and community.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Betsy Fitzpatrick  
Executive Assistant to the School Committee