

The Public Schools of Brookline
School Committee Meeting of Thursday, February 16, 2017
Superintendent Report
Andrew J. Bott
Superintendent of Schools

Follow-up Meeting with MSAN Student Representatives

You will recall that the student representatives from the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) Student Conference presented to the School Committee on January 19. As planned, we held a follow-up meeting with the MSAN student team on February 2 to further debrief the conference and discuss student data. Anthony Meyer, Ben Lummis, Gabe McCormick, Erin Cooley (Director of Data Analysis and Information Management) and Nikisha Gordon (BHS paraprofessional who also chaperoned the student trip) joined me in the meeting which included the following MSAN student representatives: Ty Amarant-West, Jimmy Ricks, Yama Estime, Angelica Woodson and Sabrina Zhou.

The MSAN student team was as thoughtful and honest as they were when they originally presented to the School Committee. Some spoke of having 7th and 8th grade math classes where students were clearly split into different levels, while others spoke of math classes where that was not the case. Others shared how their middle school teachers simply assumed everyone would be in honors and encouraged them to sign up for honors courses, and the confidence that this approach gave them. Students detailed the support they have received in high school that has allowed them to move up a level, into an honors or AP course, and be successful. They also discussed the subtle, and not so subtle, ways that they have been discouraged from taking advanced level courses. Next steps include meeting with the K-8 and BHS math coordinators; working with us to create a “dashboard” of data that shows key indicators and sharing that information widely with students and faculty on a regular basis; presenting the information to all principals at a Leadership Team meeting; and presenting to students at the elementary schools to emphasize the importance of taking higher level courses and how to find support at the high school to be successful. The students were very appreciative of the time we took with them and are excited about the next steps that we identified together.

School Visits

Despite the recent snow days, I have been able to join principals in visiting many classrooms over the last three weeks. Since January 30, my visits at Lawrence, Lincoln, Heath, Lower Devotion, Upper Devotion, Driscoll, Brookline High School and Baker have been filled with engaging conversations with teachers and observations of incredible student work. From project-based learning at Heath to rich history debates at BHS; from highly engaging, differentiated math work at Baker to Writer’s Workshop in Kindergarten at Lincoln, our students are actively engaged in deep and productive lessons every day.

Pierce School 8th Grade Civil Rights Projects

On January 25 it was my pleasure to visit Pierce School to observe the 8th grade student Civil Rights projects. Nicole Gittens, Lesley Ryan Miller and Gabe McCormick joined me at this visit. Led by Social Studies teacher Jamie Yadoff the students proudly displayed their work, discussed their research, and answered questions about their findings. The variety of formats used by students to present their learning was notable, and it was clear that students had gone above and beyond in their efforts because they found the topic so interesting and pertinent.

Annual Family and Staff Feedback Surveys

We will launch our annual Family and Staff Feedback Surveys at the end of the month. Surveys will be distributed electronically to parents and guardians on February 28 and to staff on March 6. This confidential survey will help us learn more about the climate and culture in our schools and across the district. It is my hope that the results of the survey will confirm the many strengths of each school and point out areas to be addressed in future School

Improvement Plans. The survey will be available in English, Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish to allow families to complete the survey in their preferred language. All permanent faculty, and school and central office-based educational staff, will have the opportunity to participate in the staff survey. Parents and guardians will complete a survey for any school in which they have a child. These surveys provide an opportunity for honest, anonymous feedback about climate, culture, and leadership at our schools and in the district. Each school will share their survey results as part of the annual School Improvement Plan development process.

In order to analyze results longitudinally, we are using the same questions as last year with only minor modifications. The results of the survey will be reported in the aggregate for each school and the district as a whole to ensure confidentiality. No one will be able to see individual responses from any parent or staff member.

Winter Finally Arrived

As you know, we had our first school cancellations of the year on February 9, 10, and 13. I want to thank Public Works Commissioner Andy Pappastergion and the entire Department of Public Works for their support and partnership over the past week. Commissioner Pappastergion, Town Administrator Mel Kleckner and I were in close contact each day and evening leading up to the decisions on cancelling school and whether or not to keep administrative offices open.

As with any severe weather, the recent snow raised a couple of challenges. During the construction of the Devotion School, Stop and Shop has made available to us (at no charge) 12 parking spots in their Harvard Street store lot. These spots are used by Lower Devotion school teachers and are part of a larger parking plan designed to minimize any impact on the parking needs of Coolidge Corner merchants and residents. Due to the snow, Stop and Shop informed us that these spots would not be available to our staff; the store would need the space for mounds of plowed snow. Working with Commissioner Pappastergion and his staff we came up with a solution that works for all parties and is a great example of interdepartmental cooperation and public-private collaboration. Public Works will plow the spots for Stop and Shop making them available to our staff during the day and store customers at all other times.

Brookline Housing Authority

In late January, I had the opportunity to tour Brookline Housing Authority properties with BHA Executive Director Patrick Dober. I am very appreciative of the time that Mr. Dober spent showing me around and sharing a bit of history, as well. Patrick and I were able to use our time together to discuss ways that we can build upon and strengthen the partnership between the Brookline Housing Authority and the Public Schools of Brookline.

Learning Walk at Upper Devotion

Our series of regular *Learning Walks* continue. As you know, the Learning Walks are scheduled school visits for principals, coordinators and district administrators to learn first-hand about the practices that are happening across the district. The knowledge that we collectively gain serves to support our work in enhancing student experiences at every school.

On Tuesday, Principal Monica Crowley led a Learning Walk at Upper Devotion School; Jen Buller, Dave O'Hara, Chris Kelley, Jim Stoddard and I participated. Our visiting team was struck by the welcoming feel to the building and the sense that students really enjoy being there. We observed high engagement by students in all classrooms, especially notable since it was the first day back after the snow day absences. Students were working collaboratively in groups, paraprofessionals were supporting students in various settings, and teachers were seamlessly tending to lessons and student needs. We observed great collaboration among the librarian, middle school ELA teachers, paraprofessionals and special education teachers to support students with special needs. A social studies lesson closed with a wonderfully interactive activity that focused on making thinking visible. Math lessons successfully utilized several engagement strategies and featured strong collaboration with the special

education teacher. Evidence of literacy work was quite strong in all 5th grade classrooms. Students were highly engaged in the work they were doing in both writing and using visualization strategies while practicing through poetry.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy's 100th Birthday Celebration

Students from Devotion School were the center of attention yesterday at the Massachusetts State House. To kick-off a year-long series of events to commemorate the 100th Birthday of President John F. Kennedy, three 8th graders and five 3rd graders from Devotion School opened a Joint Session of the Massachusetts House of Representatives and the State Senate accompanied by Governor Baker and Lieutenant Governor Polito. Our student delegation led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance, attended the ceremony and joined in the reception. Representative Frank Smizik greeted our students on the floor of the House Chambers and welcomed them to the State House.

The student group, joined by principals Monica Crowley and Jen Buller, teachers Gretchen Albertini and Jessica Falzone, paraprofessional Kirsten Mallory, and two parent chaperones, also met Kathleen Kennedy Townsend in House Speaker DeLeo's office and spoke with Francisco Urena, Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Services. As you know, John F. Kennedy attended the Devotion School as a young boy so it was most fitting that our students were chosen for this remarkable honor.

Congratulations to Sara Hogenboom

Sara Hogenboom, senior at Brookline High School, was recently selected as one of the two winners from Massachusetts in the US Senate Youth Program. She will spend a week in Washington in March with the other winners from around the country and she will be awarded a \$10,000 college scholarship. The selection process involved a test of US government and current events, followed by interviews. Sara is a member of Judiciary at BHS and she is one of two students representing BHS on Representative Joe Kennedy's student youth council. Congratulations to Sara – we wish her the best of luck with this wonderful opportunity.