

The Public Schools of Brookline
School Committee Meeting of Thursday, May 10, 2018
Superintendent Report
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Superintendent of Schools

Congratulations and Welcome!

I would like to congratulate Barbara Scotto on her reelection to the School Committee, and welcome new members Jennifer Monopoli and David Pearlman. I truly look forward to our work together in the years to come.

School Visits

Since our last meeting, I have been able to join principals for in-depth classroom visits at:

- o Lower Devotion School on April 27
- o Baker School on April 30
- o Lincoln School on May 2

These visits, a permanent fixture in my weekly calendar, allow me to observe classrooms, spend time with educators and students, and support principals in their work.

Restorative Justice

As a part of the FY19 budget, the District committed resources over the next three fiscal years to support the integration of Restorative Justice Practices into our schools.

The Suffolk University Center for Restorative Justice website describes restorative practice as follows:

Restorative justice is a value-based approach to conflict and harm. These values are often identified as inclusion, democracy, responsibility, reparation, safety, healing and reintegration. But one value is more essential than any other - Respect.

For Victims. Restorative responses empower victims by offering them a voice in the process, an opportunity to ask questions and seek answers, afford them a role in decision-making and avenues for healing, restitution and emotional support.

For Wrongdoers. Restorative responses enable wrongdoers to be accountable for their conduct; affords opportunities to make amends and express remorse; offers constructive ways to repair harm; supports making responsible choices; and creates forums for forgiveness, reconciliation and reintegration.

For Communities. Restorative responses re-invest citizens with the power to contribute meaningfully to the resolution of community problems; allows citizens to articulate and affirm the moral standards of the community; provides a forum for addressing the underlying conditions which generate harm; and contributes toward the building of safe, thriving and peaceful communities.

The values at the core of Restorative Justice Practices go even deeper. We aim for these values to be an embedded part of our school-wide culture. When implemented properly, restorative practices become

the basis for how we interact with each other. Restorative practices are not only the steps taken after the fact when a transgression has occurred; they are also about fostering healthy relationships, strengthening relationships between individuals, and reinforcing social connections within communities.

The integration of Restorative Justice into our schools is critical if we are to successfully live the mission and vision of the Public Schools of Brookline. Its use in our schools and across our community is equally important if we are to achieve the District's four goals. Speaking personally, the most powerful experience I have had as an educator was my participation in a restorative circle with students, families and educators following the racist videos that surfaced among high school students before the Thanksgiving holiday. The inherent respect and meaningful resolution that is achieved through the restorative justice process is incredibly important, and the underlying values should be held and taught by all members of our community.

There are many people - educators, parents, students, and citizens - who share the common vision of weaving restorative practices into the fabric of our schools. Dr. Maria Letasz, Director of Guidance and Clinical Services and Gabriel McCormick, Director of Professional Development, are leading this work for our District. They have begun working with Suffolk University and other Restorative Justice Partners to understand both the capacity to train PSB educators as well as their interest in partnering with us in this important work. In the coming weeks, Dr. Letasz and Mr. McCormick will work with educators, clinicians, and the Brookline Educators Union to develop a three-year plan for bringing Restorative Justice to all Brookline schools, with the goal of starting implementation no later than September 2018. I look forward to sharing updates with the School Committee as the plan is developed, finalized, and implemented in the years ahead.

Instructional Leadership Teams

The budget approved by the School Committee includes \$100,000 set aside for Response to Intervention. As described at various School Committee meetings, the Select Board presentation, and at the Town Advisory Committee's review of the budget, the vision is for these funds to support the launch of Instructional Leadership Teams at each school. The creation of these teams would be modeled on the very successful Child Study Team structure that was launched in the District several years ago. I am personally excited about this effort, as Instructional Leadership Teams are a proven means to decentralize instructional decision making, with principals and teachers working together at the school level. While all schools continue working towards the same District goals, the ways students are supported and the path taken towards achieving those goals are set by school based teams. Instructional Leadership Teams are also a powerful way to embrace and support educational innovation that is an important part of the fabric of our schools. Schools use their ILT as a shared decision making structure to ensure that staff are involved in developing and leading the instructional priorities and decisions of the school. ILTs allow for site based, educator-led decision making and empower educators to work with the principal to make instructional decisions that best serve students.

Ben Lummis has been coordinating work with principals, the Office of Teaching and Learning, and the Office of Student Services to develop a draft plan. This draft plan was shared earlier today with the Brookline Educators Union, and Ben will work closely with our BEU president to bring educator perspective, voice and feedback into the development of this plan. I anticipate the launch of school-based Instructional Leadership Teams in the fall of 2018.

BHS Social Emotional Support to be Highlighted in NBC10 Documentary on Adolescent Anxiety

Brookline High School's work supporting the emotional health of our students will be highlighted next week on NBC10's documentary on adolescent anxiety. NBC10 has started producing 30-minute documentaries on health and wellness issues of interest to local viewers. The producer reached out to us to see if she could include BHS in the report to show how a school works with its students. Ben Lummis worked with Anthony Meyer to coordinate the effort. BHS social worker Fran Kuehn, school psychologist Matt Dubois, and BHS senior Rebecca Schein were all interviewed on camera. Mr. Kuehn talked about the history and diversity of our many support programs that are designed to build coping skills and resilience in our students and highlighted the work BHS has been doing on mindfulness. Mr. DuBois described the counseling and intervention services we provide. Rebecca described how the skills she has learned and the support she has received from high school staff have helped her to manage the stress and anxiety of high school. Thank you to Fran, Matt, and Rebecca for representing the high school so well and speaking so openly and honestly about such an important topic. The documentary will air on NBC10 on May 23 at 7:30 p.m., on NECN on May 24 at 8:00 p.m., and on Telemundo Boston on June 3 at 6:00 p.m.

Steps to Success Inc. Gala

Last night I had the pleasure of attending the Steps to Success, Inc. annual gala, held at the Clay Observatory at Dexter Southfield School. This is the signature fundraising event for Steps and also serves to showcase the accomplishments of our students served by the program. It was a fantastic evening. The night's honoree was Jim Fitzgibbons who has served as a member of the Development Committee for 12 years. From hosting meetings around his dining room table to chairing the signature gala, Jim's support has been integral to the success of the Steps organization.

Despite a late night last night, Steps to Success joined us early this morning at the monthly Parent Leaders meeting of PTO and School Council co-chairs. Jeanette Lindor, Steps to Success Coordinator, and Shoma Haque, Steps to Success, Inc. Executive Director, talked with parents about the 3-way partnership between the Public Schools of Brookline, the Brookline Housing Authority, and Steps to Success, Inc. Their presentation focused on the many ways that our students are supported with holistic programs during the school day and out of school time, during the school year and during vacations and over the summer. I have attached a copy of their presentation for your information. We are fortunate to enjoy such broad-based support in this critical work.

Invitation from C-SPAN

You might recall that in my March 22 report I shared the news that three Brookline High School students had received a third place prize in the C-SPAN annual national video documentary contest. The competition called for students to submit a short documentary about a provision in the U.S. Constitution and its importance to them. Our students - Chloe Janes, Bryan Zhu and Romy Meehan - submitted an entry titled *Under Siege: The Assault on the American Press* that highlighted the First Amendment freedom of the press. The competition received a record 2,985 video submissions from over 5,700 students in 46 states - so this third place prize is quite an honor!

Officials from C-SPAN will be at Brookline High School for a small ceremony on **Tuesday, May 15 at 8:40am** to present the students with their prize. C-SPAN has invited School Committee members to attend. Please let Betsy know if you will attend and we will be sure to RSVP for you.

If you haven't yet seen the video, it is available at this link: <https://www.viddler.com/v/d4a952b8>

BEEP Building Update

On Monday, May 7, BEEP Principal Vicki Milstein, School Committee member Helen Charlupski, and I met with CBT Architects to review the current plans for the Early Childhood building being built for the Town of Brookline at 131 Harvard Street. The building will be leased to the Town of Brookline for \$1 for 20 years thanks to the generosity of Laura Trust and Alan Litchman. The land acquisition, development costs, and complete furnishings will total approximately \$10 million, all privately paid for by Ms. Trust and Mr. Litchman.

The new building will have space for an early childhood autism program, as well as 6 additional classrooms. All early childhood intake staff will be located in the building and there will be a dedicated parent resource center. The building will feature a maker space, a child sized kitchen for science experiments, a dedicated space for extended day, and a sensory gym for children with special needs. The 5th floor outdoor space is partially covered by the 6th floor overhang, to provide shade, and will have a water element, opportunities for art activities and gross motor space. The outdoor space is oriented away from some of the nearby commercial abutters.

The building is scheduled to be completed during the 2019-2020 school year and we anxiously await this amazing space for our youngest students.

Devotion Project Update

On March 8, 2018 I toured the Devotion School with Tony Guigli, the Town Project Manager for the Devotion School project. While there is much work still to be done, the contractors are confident that the school will be complete and ready to open for the start of school in September.

Planning for the move back to Devotion, Principals Monica Crowley, Jen Buller, and David O'Hara, and Vice Principal Saeed Ola have been working closely with BEU representatives Jessica Wender-Shubow, Jen Jordan, Daniel Lipton, Amy Kane and Jeremy Bloch to finalize plans for packing and returning to the new school building. This close collaboration between educational leaders, the BEU president, Director of Operations Matt Gillis, and the BEU representatives from both Lower and Upper Devotion Schools will ensure a collaborative, transparent process for packing, moving, and returning to the new school building.

On **Tuesday May 22, 2018 at 3:30 p.m.** all Devotion School educators will be able to tour the new building. I want to extend an invitation to School Committee members to join our educators on this tour. It will be a great opportunity to see the state-of-the-art educational facility that the Town has built. From the design of the classrooms, to the inclusion of collaborative and project learning spaces throughout the school, this is a building that matches the priorities and educational values of Brookline.

Brookline - Xi'an China Exchange Program (CHEX)

In 1999, the district established a student exchange partnership with the Gaoxin No. 1 High School in Xi'an, China. Since then, the program has flourished. Each year, a group of students from Gaoxin No. 1 High School spend the fall semester at Brookline High School, and we complete the exchange in the spring by sending 8 students and 1 teacher to Xi'an. CHEX is led by a Steering Committee and coordinated by BHS teacher Steve Lantos.

A delegation from Xi'an visited Brookline in October 2016. This year we are honored to be reciprocating by sending a 7-member delegation to Xi'an next week. Joining me for the week in China

will be School Committee members Susan Wolf Ditkoff and Barbara Scotto, Deputy Superintendent Nicole Gittens, BHS Headmaster Anthony Meyer, CHEX Coordinator Steve Lantos, and the Chair of the CHEX Steering Committee Karyn Wang. Karyn is a tireless advocate and booster of the program, and we thank her for all of her efforts in organizing this trip. We have a full and exciting itinerary and I look forward to sharing the highlights of our trip at the next School Committee meeting.