

The Public Schools of Brookline
School Committee Meeting of Thursday, September 12, 2019
Superintendent Report
Ben Lummis
Interim Superintendent of Schools

2019 School Opening

I'm pleased to report a very successful opening to the 2019-2020 school year! There are many facets to the start of the year that I would like to highlight this evening.

Our Leadership Team (principals and senior leadership) began preparing for September back in July, starting with our 4-day workshop. This meeting happened immediately after Superintendent Bott announced his intention to resign. We worked together to build our team and identify a shared focus for the year. This year we will focus on developing common procedures in a few key areas, working together on common areas of practice such as our professional development day, effective faculty meetings, and growing strong school cultures.

The school year unofficially kicked-off for our 75+ educational leaders with the annual workshop on August 26 at Boston University's Wheelock College Campus. In addition to catching up with each other after a summer apart, we spent the day learning more about educational equity, the challenging fiscal climate we face, budgeting processes and procedures, the new code of conduct, and our responsibilities to students under Title VI and Title IX.

The following three days, August 27-29, were dedicated to new teacher orientation held at the Coolidge Corner School. Day one was coordinated by our Human Resources office and provided teachers with important information about technology, payroll, and benefits, and featured a presentation by BEU President Jessica Wender-Shubow. Day two, coordinated by the Office of Teaching and Learning, gave new teachers exposure to the Aspen student information system, goal setting for teacher evaluation, and cultural proficiency. On day three of orientation, under the guidance of their principal, our newest educators reported to their school buildings to settle into their new work space. I would like to thank my colleagues in the Human Resources and Teaching and Learning offices for all of their hard work organizing this year's new teacher orientation.

When the calendar turned to September, we were prepared. As you know, teachers report for two work days before students arrive. In addition to preparing their classrooms and meeting with their colleagues, teachers also participate in school-based faculty meetings. As is the custom, BEU President Jessica Wender-Shubow and I crisscrossed Brookline to visit all schools (including BHS and BEEP) on September 3 and September 4 to present welcoming remarks at these faculty meetings. My opening remarks focused on my reasons for seeking to be Interim Superintendent, what our staff can expect from me, and what I expect from them. I shared my intention to successfully serve as a bridge to the next Superintendent and offer stability to the district during challenging times. I reiterated my pledge to serve as a positive and civil leader who will listen closely and work with others to find solutions to the challenges we face. I asked our staff to lean in, help out and support others when they make mistakes. I closed my remarks by stressing how essential each one of our school based staff members and central office colleagues are to making our schools work for our students and saying that "We are all the Public Schools of Brookline."

I have heard again and again how well organized and thoughtful these opening days were for our staff. All schools had some initial training on the new code of conduct procedures and approach, and then each school organized the rest of the time to support their staff aligned with their school's needs.

Here are just two examples of these opening day activities. At Lawrence, all faculty and staff worked with the Riverside Community Health Center to learn about supporting students who have experienced trauma. Teachers and staff reported to Principal Crowley that this training was incredibly powerful and impactful. Coolidge Corner School also had very strong opening days. Principal Buller prepared all summer, meeting with staff and families as she and her vice principals mapped out how to make progress on their two primary goals for the year: community building and identifying clear procedures for staff and families. All CCS staff worked with Jessica Minahan, author of *The Behavior Code*, to learn more about proactively addressing and responding to tricky behaviors triggered by student anxiety. The staff also reviewed and became familiar with their new Staff Resource Guide which clarifies expectations for operational procedures and processes such as Child Study Teams, attendance, lunch supervision, and safety plans.

The first day of school for students in grades 1-9 on Thursday, September 5 was, by all accounts, a great success. I watched the 9th graders at Brookline High School participate in an annual rite of passage: processing from Cypress Field into the Quad led by their junior class mentors and cheered on by the BHS staff. I also visited Heath School, Coolidge Corner School and Pierce School - as well as the early education classrooms on Clark Road - on opening day. This week I have been able to visit all of our schools to see first-hand the positive and powerful start we are off to. Our students are learning the new routines in their classrooms. Teachers are explaining expectations. The middle school students at Lincoln are taking responsibility for their composting program. Kindergarteners are learning their letters through singing. Ninth graders are doing a fantastic job travelling to and from Old Lincoln School.

An important component in a successful school year is providing effective support to our district leaders. To that end, we have secured mentors for Torrance Lewis (Baker School Principal) and Dr. Suzie Talukdar (Driscoll School Principal), and are close to finalizing mentors for Jennifer Buller (Coolidge Corner School Principal) and Casey Ngo-Miller (Deputy Superintendent for Student Services). We are confident that with the support of professional and skilled mentors our newest leaders will grow and thrive.

Finally, I wrote to parents on Thursday evening, September 5 (see attached) to introduce myself and welcome them to the school year.

Successful Opening at Clark Road:

I am pleased to report that three new early education classrooms successfully opened at the Clark Road site last week (one of the classes was previously located at Driscoll School). It took an amazing amount of work by many of our colleagues to orchestrate this move over the summer.

In addition to the three BEEP classrooms, the Clark Road site will also be the new location for many central office staff formerly located on Webster Place. The early education (BEEP) and adult education (BACE) staff already moved to Clark Road in late August. At the end of next week, they will be joined

by more staff from Webster Place, including the food service, transportation, operations, and Steps to Success program staff.

Our special education colleagues, who are currently located on the 4th floor in Town Hall, will also be moving to Clark Road. That space will then be occupied by staff from the Office of Enrollment and Registration and Office of English Learner Education staff.

The final moves from Webster Place will be our METCO staff and some members of our Data Team who will be moving to the 5th floor of Town Hall.

Moving one's office is difficult at any time of year, but is especially challenging at the start of a school year. Meeting with a family in an office filled with boxes and packing materials while a cubicle next to you is being loudly disassembled is not easy! I would like to acknowledge the admirable work done by all of our colleagues to make this successful and extend my thanks to everyone who labored under these trying conditions.

The space at Clark Road has exceeded our expectations. It is clean and bright, well organized and spacious. It has taken a full team effort to successfully launch our BEEP classrooms there. Thank you to our BEEP teachers Melissa Lyons, Kweku Donkor and Ashley Zimmerman for all their hard work in opening these classrooms. Thank you to Ed Clancy, our custodial staff, and the Town's Building Department for their incredible work to get the building ready. Thank you to our Town IT Department for literally getting fiber strung from BHS to the Clark Road building so we could have phones and internet before school started. And thank you to two tremendous leaders without whom this just would not have happened: Matt Gillis who worked on so many levels and with so many people to order furniture, get the technology working, finalize the lease, work with Maimonides, organize the move, and get parking arranged and Regina Watts our Interim Principal for BEEP who supported parents and teachers, cajoled, cleaned, troubleshooted, and willed the classrooms into existence during the month of August.

Student Enrollment and Registration

The former Office of Student Affairs – as of this evening the more appropriately named Office of Enrollment and Registration – had another busy summer. OER is responsible for guiding our newest families through the registration process and welcoming them to the Public Schools of Brookline.

As of today, **unofficially** we have **582** students in our kindergarten classes (this is four more students than we had just two days ago when we presented the enrollment during the Capital Subcommittee meeting - that is how quickly new students are being registered and enrolled). We have an additional 12 kindergarten students in the registration pipeline (awaiting an English Language screening or an immunization approval, for example), so the number of kindergarten students will be above 590 in the next few days.

In July and August 2019, OER registered **507** students (**353** of those students were registered in August alone and **70** of them were kindergarten students). **60%** of the **507** students registered over the summer (**304 students**) were identified as needing the mandated English Language (EL) screening. These EL screenings are comprehensive, and take an average of 1.25 hours per student to

administer. The screening assessing a student's English proficiency and the results allow us to offer the student appropriate EL supports so that he or she can access the curriculum and be successful.

From the start of the registration period (January 2019) through today, OER registered **1,139** students (this number jumps to 1,281 if you include BEEP students and Brookline residents registered only to receive special education services from the district) for the 2019-2020 school year. More than **7%** of our student body (grades 1-12, not including kindergarten) is new to the district this September. Our enrollment remains dynamic throughout the month of September and we won't report the official enrollment to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education until October 1.

I am extremely proud of the work we do in the Office of Enrollment and Registration to properly register new students and, more importantly, to welcome them to our school community.

Of course, the registration process is just the beginning. Once registration is complete the student begins the enrollment process with the careful assistance of his or her guidance counselor. Our guidance counselors meet with every new student/family to introduce them to the school, share information and schedules, discuss any special education considerations, and determine a class placement. All of this individual attention ensures a smooth transition for our new students.

Work with our Kindergarten Teachers

Dr. Nicole Gittens, Dr. Regina Watts, Dr. Mary Brown, Joanna Lieberman and I are continuing our important work with kindergarten teachers this year. On Friday, September 6, we met for two hours with 14 kindergarten teachers in the Driscoll Library to begin this process. The passion, intelligence, thoughtfulness and care expressed over and over again by everyone at the meeting can't be overstated. It was a powerful and productive meeting.

Our first - of four - planned work days this school year is scheduled for September 25. Over the course of the year we will focus on reading levels, play based learning, intentional reading and writing instruction, and schedules. I look forward to keeping you apprised of this important work.

I have attached my August 30 letter to our kindergarten teachers to give you some additional information about these important issues.

Brookline High School Innovation Fund

I am pleased to share news from the BHS Innovation Fund of their generous FY20 program awards. As you know, the BHS Innovation Fund fosters a culture of innovation at Brookline High School by supporting the development of new interdisciplinary courses and school-wide programs that prepare Brookline's students to thrive in an ever-changing and complex world. This year, the Fund will support the following programs at BHS totaling over \$240,000:

- **Experiential Physics** for 9th grade, a robust, new physics course that develops scientific, engineering, and entrepreneurial skills to teach students collaborative approaches to designing solutions to today's problems.

- **HUB**, an updated approach to school-wide Advisory that emphasizes community and connection among students and faculty in a homeroom-style setting. Integrating BHS and PSB practices such as Finding Yourself in the Curriculum, Mindfulness (both Innovation Fund initiatives), and Restorative Justice, HUB will be responsive to the always-changing needs and concerns of the entire high school.
- **Brookline Lens**, a career-focused arts elective that gives students the opportunity to learn business management skills as part of a student-run production company that provides photography and videography services to the community.
- **Finding Yourself in the Curriculum**, to share and celebrate identity/equity lesson plans in various BHS departments.
- **The BHS Innovation Fellowship**, supporting a faculty member to explore an area of interest while serving as a catalyst for innovation in the BHS community. The 2019-20 Fellow will focus on integrating climate impact and global sustainability topics into the BHS culture and curriculum.

We are incredibly grateful to the Innovation Fund for their amazing support of Brookline High School's educators and students.



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BEN LUMMIS

INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT

September 5, 2019

Dear PSB Families,

Welcome to the 2019-2020 school year in Brookline. What a great day we had today!

9th grade students participated in the annual Brookline High School rite of passage of processing from Cypress Field into the Quad led by their junior class mentors and cheered on by the BHS staff. I saw kindergarten teachers at Heath, Coolidge Corner, and Pierce helping their young students learn about their new classrooms. First graders learned about the materials in their classrooms by practicing with pencils, crayons, and erasers, not knowing that their teachers were also doing the important work of noticing their students' fine motor skills.

The 3rd and 4th graders at Coolidge Corner School learned the basics of taking care of their cafeteria before heading out to recess. Pierce 8th graders played a name game as one of their first steps in building their classroom community. At Heath, an art teacher put the final preparations on bouquets of sunflowers before welcoming her class in to get started with still life drawings. At our new BEEP classrooms at Clark Road, I saw BEEP teachers meeting with parents and making final preparations for their students who start on Monday.

And I saw smiles. Lots and lots of smiles. We are off to a great start.

As you may know, I was appointed Interim Superintendent just two weeks ago, replacing Superintendent Bott who resigned this summer. Since then, I have been humbled by the outpouring of support and the confidence that teachers, parents, school and central office staff have expressed in me.

Earlier this week, as our teachers, staff, custodians, school secretaries, school leaders, nurses, librarians, and so many others made final preparations for the new school year, I had the pleasure of visiting every school with the Brookline Educators Union President Dr. Jessica Wender-Shubow. We each gave a welcome message for all school-based staff to help open the year.

In my opening message, I pledged to be a positive and civil leader who listens closely, seeks understanding, and works with others to find solutions to the challenges we will face this year.

For me, civility happens in many small ways. It's saying hello to each other and greeting every student as they enter our classrooms. It's a smile and a thank you. Being civil means asking someone how they are doing and taking a moment to really listen. To me, civility means that I genuinely care how I treat others.

Yet civility is about more than just politeness. It is about disagreeing without disrespecting, seeking common ground, listening past one's preconceptions, and teaching others to do the same. I want you to know that I will work every day to make sure we lift up more voices, create space for those who are quieter or have different views, and make sure not just the loudest are speaking. I will lead in this way. I invite you to join me.

As I said to our staff this week, we are the Public Schools of Brookline. Every child, every family member, every educator, every person who works in our schools and those who work in our central office. It takes all of us. Every single one of us. Together we will make it a great year of learning for every one of our students.

Sincerely,

Ben Lummis
Interim Superintendent



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Ben Lummis
Interim Superintendent

August 30, 2019

Dear Kindergarten Teachers,

I hope you have had a restful, fun, and perhaps an adventurous summer.

I am reaching out to provide some immediate answers about the most pressing concerns raised by kindergarten teachers earlier this year and let you know how we will work together to find lasting solutions. First, thank you for your patience while I've gotten my feet under me over the past couple of weeks. Please know that the important questions you raised have been top of mind for me. By listening closely to teachers and parents in the spring, and through my work over the years with Vicki Milstein, Regina Watts, Nicole Gittens, Mary Brown, Joanna Lieberman, and Superintendent Bott, I am well aware of these issues.

In her August 22 email to me, Dr. Gittens, and Dr. Watts, Nicole Chasse stated, *"Despite our change in leadership, and the district's many tasks during this period of transition, we remain hopeful that we can continue this productive dialogue as we consider best practices in Early Childhood classrooms."* Dr. Gittens, Dr. Watts, and I absolutely want to continue this dialogue. We will use kindergarten professional development days to work together on finding long term answers to the questions around play-based learning, teaching foundational literacy skills in kindergarten, and scheduling. We will work with you on four days this year, with the first full day session scheduled for September 25.

In the immediate term, I invite all kindergarten teachers to meet with me on Friday, September 6 starting at 2:00 and going as long as needed. This optional meeting will give us a chance to start getting to know each other, and to hear your ideas on how we might best work together this year. I understand that this time is scheduled as your collaborative time, and that it's a little nuts to have a meeting after the second day of school, but I simply want to give us a chance as soon as possible. Again, this is optional; we will distribute a summary for everyone unable to attend. I will let you know about a location next week.

Also, in her August 22 email, Ms. Chasse wrote the following - *"At this meeting Mr. Bott expressed that he believes in the importance of play in the classroom, and that curriculum integration is key to ensuring children's engagement and fostering our students' intellect and love of learning. He also acknowledged that the planning involved in this type of teaching and learning is extensive and necessary to make sure our students are receiving a quality, integrated, play-based experience. We could not agree more!"* Please know that I agree wholeheartedly with Superintendent Bott as well.

I also want to directly address the four most pressing concerns brought up in both Ms. Chasse's and Ms. Koocher's emails.

Concern #1: "Add 60 minutes daily of play/choice time to district time allocations for Kindergarten."

Response: At this point, each kindergarten classroom should have at least 60 minutes each day for play/choice time in their schedule. If that is not the case, please work directly with your principal to be sure that time is carved out. How any teacher uses this time is up to them, but all learning time should be intentionally planned so children are receiving a quality, integrated and developmentally appropriate experience. Please note that this time may or may not be contiguous, but will be an hour in total.

Concern #2: "Return the end of year reading expectation to instructional C . . . we know that it is not developmentally appropriate to expect that all children will read by the end of kindergarten. We would like to be involved when decisions that impact our students directly are being considered, and moving forward we ask that you please consult with educators prior to making changes to past practice like this."

Response: This year, we will build consensus on expected reading levels together. In the meanwhile, all kindergarten teachers should continue to employ the solid literacy teaching practices you have used over the years. It is most important for teachers to understand their students' progress and to be intentional about helping students progress from wherever they begin the year. The goal is not for every student to attain independent level C in kindergarten. The goal is for their teachers to know if any students are struggling to make progress toward a developmentally appropriate goal. If any student is having trouble making progress toward the developmentally appropriate goal, then teachers and school staff should work to understand if the student needs any additional support at that time or could benefit from a different approach.

Concern #3: The block-scheduling model is a system many of us have concerns about and we would like to have more conversations about how it is being used in kindergarten classrooms. It seems like scheduling is working at some schools but not at others, and therefore we would like for you to give teachers autonomy to make scheduling decisions that work best in their individual classes

Response: Yes, we will have more conversations about scheduling and how kindergarten teachers are use time. Scheduling our schools is an incredibly complex endeavor because of sharing staff between grade levels and schools, and the wide variety of supports we choose to provide and are morally and legally obligated to provide. This complexity makes it very difficult to leave scheduling of some subject areas and grades up to individual teachers because we must ensure that the correct specialists, English language education teachers, speech and language pathologists, and other teachers are available to the right classes at the right times so students can be fully supported.

Every spring and summer principals, vice principals, central office staff, and a small number of teachers work incredibly hard to try to balance all of the competing priorities within any school. The level of autonomy for each teacher may differ at each school, but district staff does not determine that. The principal and those developing the master schedule at the school determine this because they know the school best.

Concern #4: Teachers benefit from time to collaborate, and we would love for Professional Development plans to once again include time for Kindergarten teachers from across the district to meet, share, and learn together.

Response: Yes, absolutely. With this year's approach to professional development, we were already planning to have kindergarten teachers from across the district work together on four professional development release days. We will repurpose this time so kindergarten teachers, special education teachers, and literacy specialists can work with district leaders to build common understanding on kindergarten instructional practices.

Additionally, I want to directly address the concerns some teachers and parents raised regarding the health and safety of students. If, at any time, any teacher or staff member is ever concerned about the health and safety of a student they need to immediately stop what they are doing and look into the matter. If they cannot address their concern satisfactorily at that time or during that class period, or if the matter continues, that employee must seek immediate support for that student by working with the school's principal, guidance counselor, nurse, psychologist, social worker, or any other school or district staff.

We have a diverse kindergarten team with regard to teaching experience, career span in Brookline, cultural background, teaching styles, and much more, and it is important that we listen to all of these perspectives. I believe it is worth our collective time to work through these issues together because a child's early education experience is the foundation upon which their education is built.

Dr. Gittens, Dr. Watts, Dr. Brown, Ms. Lieberman and I are very much looking forward to working with you this year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "BL", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Ben Lummis
Interim Superintendent