

The Public Schools of Brookline
School Committee Meeting of Thursday, September 13, 2018
Superintendent Report
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Superintendent of Schools

Successful Opening to the 2018-2019 School Year

In my opening letter to parents and guardians, I talked about my reflection over the course of the summer on what it will take for us to continue the progress we have made recently. After carefully listening to feedback from parents and educators from across the district, I committed the district to strengthening **community, collaboration, and communication**.

Building community, deepening collaboration and improving communication, when done well, have the potential to profoundly shape how our schools operate. By focusing on community, collaboration, and communication, we will strengthen academic achievement for all learners, build strong social emotional supports in our schools, empower educators and principals to make wise school-based decisions, and develop long-term fiscal plans that support our schools. Most importantly, we will be better able to unlock the talents and gifts of each and every one of our students, providing the foundation that each of them needs in order to realize their full potential and achieve the dreams they have for themselves and for their future.

We discussed community, collaboration and communication with all 75+ district administrators when we met for our back-to-school retreat in late August, and I shared this with PTO and School Council leaders when we met yesterday. We aim to make community, collaboration and communication central to everything that we do.

As part of our school opening preparations, we hosted a successful 3-day **new teacher orientation** at Lincoln School in late August. The first day was led by our Human Resources staff and provided educators with an overview of benefits, payroll, and the absence reporting system, and also featured a presentation by BEU President Jessica Wender-Shubow. Day two was led by the Office of Teaching and Learning, with a focus on educational equity and the student data management system, Aspen. School Committee member Helen Charlupski was also there to welcome new teachers on day two. Finally, educators spent day three in their school. Under the guidance of their principal, new teachers toured their school and got to settle into their new work space. I would like to thank Lisa Richardson, Jill Lawrence, Jessica Molina, Gabe McCormick, Natalie Dean and Michelle McComiskey for all of their work organizing this year's new teacher orientation.

Another great event to prepare for the opening of school was held on Tuesday evening, August 28: the "**Stepping Back to School**" **barbecue** held at Clark Park and hosted jointly by Steps to Success, PSB and the Brookline Housing Authority. The evening was a fun way to get students excited for the beginning of the school year. The event also allowed families the chance to collect some school supplies and to enroll their children in STS programming. I was pleased to be part of such an exciting event and would like to thank Steps to Success Coordinator Jeanette Lindor for all of her work organizing it.

As you know, teachers and paraprofessionals have two work days prior to the arrival of students. As is the custom, BEU President Jessica Wender-Shubow and I crisscrossed Brookline to visit all 10 schools and present welcoming remarks to faculty on Tuesday September 4 and Wednesday, September 5. As part of my **opening message to faculty and staff**, I shared my three guiding principles:

- Everyone has gifts. All each of us needs is someone who keeps searching with us, and sometimes for us, to help us discover them.
- Thinking and being different is not only ok, but is something that we must celebrate. In celebrating our uniqueness and humanity, we ensure that our students are proud of who they are; of what is inside of them.
- When we surround our students with those who believe in them, they are able to find their voice, to believe in themselves, to see themselves in their future dreams.

Of course, it goes without saying that the highlight of our school year opening was **the grand reopening of the Coolidge Corner School**. After a summer of careful planning and intensive work - led so capably by Co-Principals Jen Buller and Dave O'Hara - the school opened to students on Thursday, September 6 after an official ribbon cutting by the school mascot, Bevo. The opening was preceded by four evenings of family tours so that parents and students alike could take a look at the amazing space. The contractor and architect oversaw a flurry of activity to ensure that everything was ready for the final building inspections, and after a successful fire drill the building was ready to open. Following the official opening, I joined the Coolidge Corner School PTO *Welcome Back Coffee*, which was a celebration of the reopening and the reuniting of the school community into one building after three years in two separate locations.

Over the course of the summer, to gear up for the opening, co-principals Buller and O'Hara were assisted by Vice Principal Saeed Ola and new Vice Principal Steve Simolaris. Mary Ellen Dunn, Matt Gillis and Ed Clancy, from Administration and Finance, also offered incredible support and helped to trouble shoot problems. Finally, school secretaries Linda Keaveney and Kyra Reardon, along with the entire custodial staff, worked seamlessly – under trying conditions – to get everything ready for opening day.

It is with appreciation and the deepest gratitude that I thank Tony Guigli of the Brookline Building Department for his steadfast leadership throughout the building process. His tireless commitment to the project ensured that our beautiful new school was ready for students and educators on September 6.

Our excitement at the opening of CCS was tinged with sadness upon learning of the unexpected passing of Dan Jellow on August 28. Mr. Jellow was a CCS custodian for over 30 years. At the time of his death, Dan was recuperating from surgery and was looking forward to returning to his job in the new building. We send our very sincere condolences to his wife and extended family.

Following a successful morning at CCS, I joined 9th graders at the high school and then also visited Baker School. On the second day of school, I spent the entire morning at Lawrence School.

A final piece of our successful district opening concerns **registration and enrollment**. Once again, the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) had an incredibly busy summer. Led by Meaghan Geaney (*OSA Coordinator*), with Michael Chan (*Enrollment and Community Engagement Specialist*) and Diana Bookhart

(*Senior Clerk*), OSA is responsible for guiding our newest families through the registration process and welcoming them to the Public Schools of Brookline.

We have a current kindergarten class of **602** students. In July and August, OSA registered **473** students (**364** of those students were registered in August alone and **78** of them were kindergarten students). **77%** of the **473** students registered over the summer (**376 students**) were identified as needing the mandated English Language (EL) screening. These EL screenings, overseen and managed by Mindy Paulo (*English Language Program Coordinator*) take an average of 1.25 hours per student to administer and they help us to assess the student's English proficiency. The results of the screening allow us to offer the student any necessary EL supports so that he or she can access the curriculum and be successful.

From the start of the registration period (January 2018) through today, OSA registered **1,158** students (this number jumps to 1,203 if you include BEEP students and Brookline residents registered only to receive special education services from the district). Student registration is ongoing; we have about a dozen appointments over the next several days. 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. A full **8%** of our student body (grades 1-12, not including kindergarten) are new to the district this September.

These OSA *numbers* are indeed impressive, but it's important not to lose sight of the fact that each of these numbers is an individual student. Every family has questions, needs guidance, and is seeking support. The family might be new to Brookline, new to the country, or may have limited English skills. The family might live in a buffer zone and have questions about how this will impact their child's school assignment. Assisting our new families through the process is very labor intensive and requires equal parts efficiency and alacrity. I want to acknowledge the incredible efforts of our OSA staff in this regard.

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, and determine a class placement. All of this individual attention ensures a smooth transition for our new students.

- As of today, the K-12 enrollment is: **7,630**
- This is an increase of **75** students from October 1, 2017.
- We still have many students making their way through the pre-registration process so our K-12 enrollment will likely to be closer to **7,680** students, which will be an increase of **125** students over last year.
- Including early education students, our total enrollment is likely to be close to **7,930**

The successful opening of the school year was due to careful planning and coordination over the course of the summer. Among our activities, the Leadership Team met for four days in July to plan our work for the year ahead. This included two days devoted to learning about **restorative justice practices** with staff from the Restorative Justice Center at Suffolk University. We are eager to roll-out these restorative justice practices over the course of the school year.

The one area we are still actively working to improve is **student transportation** from South Brookline. Matt Gillis, Director of Facilities and Operations, has been working closely with the bus company and its drivers to rearrange pick-up times to ensure timely arrival at the high school, especially for Route #6. The problems with the bus service were a combination of initial routing and, when routes were adjusted, a lag in the implementation of these changes. Regardless of the reasons, the problems are unacceptable. Mr. Gillis has been corresponding with the impacted families. The latest changes – made today – provide for an earlier pick-up time in South Brookline and some consolidated stops to ensure timely arrival. This morning all South Brookline to BHS buses arrived on time.

Capital Projects

We spent a considerable amount of time over the summer focused on our capital projects, including work with the architects for the BHS expansion and renovation project, the start of the feasibility study phase of the Driscoll School project, and the continued feasibility for the Baldwin School project.

Driscoll School

On Tuesday, September 11, at the Driscoll faculty meeting, I introduced architect Jonathan Levi. Mr. Levi provided the staff with an overview of the design feasibility phase of the proposed work for Driscoll School. Mr. Levi and his team will be at Driscoll School on Tuesday, September 18 to meet with parents, teachers and staff, and he will lead a visioning session on Saturday, September 22 for parents and community members.

Pierce School

The Massachusetts School Building Authority will be conducting a technical site visit to Pierce School on October 9. This visit is part of their due diligence efforts as they review the Statement of Interest we filed in April 2018 for the Pierce School project.

School Visits

Now that the school year is officially underway I have resumed my regular comprehensive visits to schools. During these extended visits, I work closely with principals to address issues or problems, providing hands-on support to them in their building. I will be visiting schools 2-3 times each week, and plan to visit each school between 8 and 10 times over the course of the school year. I already had extended visits this week at Coolidge Corner School on September 12 and Baker School on September 13.

Visiting Teachers from Saudi Arabia

This year we are hosting 24 educators visiting from Saudi Arabia through a partnership with Boston University. The visiting teachers will be immersed in our schools, in partnership with Brookline educators, to learn about our educational methods and processes. The visiting teachers have been in Boston since February. They spent the first half of their experience at Boston University taking intensive English classes and courses on pedagogy and philosophies of education at the Boston

University Wheelock College of Education and Human Development. After their experience in our schools, the visiting educators will return to BU to finalize their capstone projects.

We are very excited to have been selected to partner in this project and to open our doors to our visitors. This is a unique and powerful opportunity to participate in a professional and cultural exchange to the benefit of our host educators, our schools and our students.