

The Public Schools of Brookline
School Committee Meeting of Thursday, October 6, 2016
Superintendent Report
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Superintendent of Schools

School Visits

On Tuesday, September 27, I visited BEEP Beacon. During this visit I spent the first hour of the day touring all five classrooms. I was able to observe arrival, morning movement, and morning meeting in two classes. In each of these morning meetings, teachers brilliantly set an incredibly positive tone for the day, brought the group of three, four and five year olds together, incorporated movement and song, and embedded a great many literacy skills seamlessly into this time. In addition to the incredible instruction and the remarkable work around building a positive school climate, the BEEP Beacon team has already displayed a great deal of student work. Displays included one titled *Every Picture Tells a Story*, capturing the powerful stories our youngest students have to share with us all, and one titled *The Color of Us*, celebrating the wide ranging diversity of our students. We have a remarkable team of early childhood educators throughout our PK-12 school system and I am thrilled to share their great work with you.

Later in the day I was able to spend time visiting Pierce School. Over the course of this visit I spent time with Vice Principal Dan Green at first grade lunch, with a group of sixth grade students watching the first presidential debate (watching it during their own lunch time in preparation for a class discussion about the debate planned for class that afternoon), a visual arts class where students were learning about positive and negative space, and a third grade class writing postcards highlighting the many special and unique characteristics of Brookline and the Greater Boston area. I had the opportunity to follow up this initial visit with a second visit to Pierce on Tuesday, October 5, when I had the distinct pleasure of observing eighth grade students simulating the Constitutional Convention of 1787. I joined the fifth day of the convention, where the delegates were debating whether the federal government should be granted taxation authority. Through this work, students are not only learning a great deal about United States history, but they are also learning the complexities of debate, compromise, and the legislative process.

Also on October 5, I observed a wide range of quality literacy instruction in fourth, fifth, and sixth grade classrooms at Driscoll. Sixth grade students had read and analyzed a memoir as a first step in the process of writing their own memoirs. Fifth grade students were discussing a nonfiction piece they had read about the Hyperloop concept developed by Elon Musk, and were using the information they learned to analyze the potential benefits and drawbacks of this new transportation concept. And in the fourth grade class, the Driscoll literacy coach and homeroom teacher were partnering to teach and support the development of new analytical reading skills. The literacy work across these classes demonstrates the variety of ways teachers can use the many different components of a literacy framework to work towards achieving our common goals. As with BEEP Beacon, there are remarkable displays of student work capturing the learning of September on display throughout the halls of Driscoll.

November 8 Professional Development Day: *Interrupting the Cycle of Racism – What Can I Do?*

We are preparing for the November 8 Professional Development Day to be an extraordinary day for all teachers and school staff. The day is titled *Interrupting the Cycle of Racism – What Can I Do?* and we are working closely with acclaimed author and recently retired president of Spelman College, Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum, to make it a day that will be memorable and will spark action in the short term and for years to come.

All of our PK-12 educators, including teachers, paraprofessionals and administrators, will start the day at Brookline High School to hear Dr. Tatum's keynote address, designed to help us understand the cycle of racism and what we can do as individuals and as educators to break it. Then, after a Q&A session with Dr. Tatum, faculty and staff will engage in facilitated discussions related to her talk. After these discussions, staff will return to their buildings for lunch. The afternoon's work will be organized by each school and continue the focus on our district core values of *Respect for Human Differences* and *Educational Equity*. We anticipate that the combination of having a shared experience at the high school in the morning and then having each school use the afternoon to tailor the work to its specific context will be particularly rich. Our collective commitment to the work of educational equity and respecting our diverse backgrounds and cultures is steadfast. This day is an important, collective step forward in our work together to provide equitable educational experiences and reach equitable outcomes for all Public Schools of Brookline students.

I want to thank the Brookline Education Foundation for their generosity in supporting this work and providing the funding for Dr. Tatum's visit. I would also like to invite members of the School Committee to join us at BHS for the keynote, Q&A, and debrief sessions on November 8.

Improving our Teacher Evaluation Process - Office of Teaching and Learning Update

In response to the results of last year's Staff Survey, we have been working to improve the evaluation process. When only 24% of staff say that they learn quite a bit or very much from the evaluation process and only 38% of staff respond that the feedback they receive is quite a bit or very useful, it's clear there is room for improvement.

Last week Deputy Superintendent Nicole Gittens outlined a vision for improving the educator evaluation process. In her letter, Ms. Gittens highlighted that we will focus evaluation supports this year on a more limited number of elements in the educator evaluation rubric: Adjustment to Practice, Sharing Conclusions with Students, Meeting Diverse Needs, Student Engagement, High Expectations, and Reflective Practice.

I am very pleased with the work we are doing to move the evaluation process from an effort in compliance to a collaborative one that supports teachers with focused and meaningful feedback. Our work on evaluation is a great example of the priorities I stated before the school year began: reestablishing our commitment to collaboration, prioritizing and focusing our work, and ensuring that our system supports the success of all of our students. Focusing on these six elements will help us better support our wide range of students and will highlight the importance of working together to reflect on and improve our practice. And, as Deputy Superintendent Gittens said in her letter, principals, vice-principals and coordinators will collaborate to improve the way we provide feedback to teachers and staff.

It is important to note that the improvements we're making are not changes to the evaluation process, to the rubric used as a part of this process, or to the prior evaluation agreement. Rather these are changes to the perspective from which administrators will view evaluation supports, changes to the supports that will be offered throughout the process, and changes to the way in which professional development will be better aligned to address our collective work in meeting the district's goals.

Honoring Margaret Metzger by Honoring Our Colleagues

Margaret Metzger (1945-2013) taught English at Brookline High School for over forty years, influencing thousands of students and educators through her teaching, writing, and mentoring. The Brookline Education Foundation created a unique fellowship in her honor to be awarded to Brookline educators to support the continuation of writing about and reflecting on the craft of teaching.

On September 30 the Brookline Education Foundation recognized the 2016 Margaret Metzger Fellowship grant recipients at an event at the Lincoln School. This year's honorees are:

- Jen Breen Rose-Wood, BHS English
- Malcolm Cawthorne, BHS Social Studies
- Teresa Gallo-Toth, Runkle Librarian
- Marie Leman, Lawrence 3rd grade
- Greg Porter, Lawrence Social Studies
- Jan Preheim, Lincoln 5th grade

Each honoree gave a talk about why they teach and why they continue to teach. A common theme among the six teachers was what students have taught them and particularly the shifts in their approach and teaching that resulted from student input. These were deeply felt pieces that uncovered the personal stories behind the everyday work of these six accomplished educators. I would also like to acknowledge and thank BHS English teacher John Andrews who gave incredible support to each Metzger Fellowship awardee in the development of their reflections.

Office of Student Services Update

One of the yearlong priorities for the Office of Student Services is to assess and realign resources including how we use our budget, how people are utilized, and how time is spent. As one part of this process, Deputy Superintendent Zimmerman has adjusted staff evaluation assignments so administrators have more equitable caseloads and to allow for content specialists to be partnered with administrators with similar backgrounds.

Deputy Superintendent Zimmerman has also been focusing early this year on building relationships with families of students with disabilities by listening to and learning from them. Recently he met with parents of students with autism at a local coffee shop to discuss the needs of these students and their families. Also, the Brookline Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) has scheduled a family engagement night at Town Hall on October 19 from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. where they will be meeting with the Deputy Superintendent. The agenda for this meeting was created with direct input from families through a survey asking for input on what topics parents and guardians want to discuss with Mr. Zimmerman. OSS has also sent home the DESE Family Engagement parent survey requesting family feedback around special

education services in multiple languages. Our district website has also been updated to allow for parents to participate via an online version of this survey. Two hundred completed surveys have already been submitted.

During the past month, OSS and the Brookline Community Mental Health Center have had a series of meetings to revise our contract and update the scope of services so it is better aligned with our district goals and priorities. We anticipate finalizing the agreement in October.

Update on our Response to the Graffiti in Cypress Field

In our ongoing response to the graffiti on Cypress Field three weeks ago, we are partnering with the Anti-Defamation League to bring their Peer Training Program to Brookline High School. This program is described by the ADL as one where:

“ . . . young people assume leadership roles in efforts to create respectful and inclusive school communities. An underlying principle of the institute is that learning about social justice issues is a lifelong process. By engaging in this process, Peer Trainers learn how to effectively respond when they hear racial slurs, name-calling, and put-downs in the hallways, lunchrooms and classrooms of their schools. They also develop skills to lead interactive discussions and workshops for their peers and younger students. The A World of Difference institute Peer Training Program provides Peer Trainers with the training and resources to design and lead interactive programs that promote an environment that is respectful and civil.”

Interim Headmaster Anthony Meyer and I are incredibly excited about this partnership, as it is another important step in our work to ensure BHS is an open and inclusive school where all members of our community feel welcome and safe. Mr. Meyer and I are meeting with members of the ADL on Thursday, October 13 to finalize the details of our partnership and plan the very important next steps of our work together. Mr. Meyer and I will update the committee on the progress of the partnership once the initial cohort of students complete their three day peer training.