

The Public Schools of Brookline
School Committee Meeting of Thursday, September 26, 2019
Superintendent Report
Ben Lummis
Interim Superintendent of Schools

Staff Affinity Group Meetings in 2019-2020

Dr. Kalise Wornum, Senior Director for Educational Equity, has coordinated a series of Affinity Group meetings for PSB staff this school year. Affinity groups for educators who identify as Latinx; Black, African, African-American or Caribbean-American; LGBTQ; and Asian, Asian-American, or Pacific Islander, will each gather four times over the course of the school year. The primary purpose of these affinity group gatherings is to provide time and a safe space for educators of a shared affinity to come together in an environment where they make up the majority. These are entirely voluntary meetings, scheduled for after-school hours here in Town Hall, during which educators will have the opportunity to discuss shared experiences, network, and support one another. We have received a large response to our invitations and we look forward to a successful series of affinity group meetings this year.

Meeting of METCO Superintendents

Milly Arbaje-Thomas, Executive Director of METCO, Inc., invited METCO Superintendents to a kick-off meeting on September 18. Hosted by the Needham Public Schools, the meeting was an opportunity for Superintendents to hear an overview of some notable and exciting changes in the METCO program this year.

As you may know, METCO, Inc. will be moving from a first-come first-served admission system to a more equitable randomized lottery system for admission. The new system should help to ensure a more diverse pool of METCO students for admission into participating school districts.

Ms. Arbaje-Thomas also shared the details of the Commonwealth's budget increase to the statewide METCO program. The budget for METCO was increased by close to \$1.5 million this year, to be distributed among all 32 participating school districts. Based on our enrollment, Brookline received an additional \$290,000 to be earmarked for transportation improvements and programmatic enhancements to better serve our METCO students. Some of our plans for these new funds include:

- Hiring of an additional METCO Advisor for Brookline High School
- Hiring of an additional METCO K-12 Social Worker
- Hiring of a College and Career Leader, with a focus of support that extends to METCO students even when they are in college
- Free-of-charge MBTA Charlie Cards for METCO students in grades 8-12
- 3-week intensive, full-day summer program for students in grades K-6, featuring both academic enrichment and fun arts and sports activities
- Additional support for our family and community engagement efforts
- The additional funds will also enable us to better resource several existing initiatives, including:

Men & Women's Leadership Conferences

The goal of our Student Leadership conferences is to support students of color in their academic and social development in high school so they can be inspired to turn their dreams into reality. The conferences are comprised of engaging panel discussions that expose students to successful professionals of color. Additionally, workshops and activities are conducted that provide them with strategies and tools they can utilize to overcome personal life challenges.

Resource Fair

The Resource Fair is a biennial event connecting local organizations with families to provide cultural, religious, social, academic, recreational, and other resources. Representatives from numerous organizations from Brookline, Boston, and other neighboring communities share information about the services they provide.

Community Lounge

Community Lounge is a monthly workshop series designed to inform, empower, and connect families with school and community resources. We explore various themes each month by featuring community representatives as speakers. This is a place for parents/guardians to express their concerns, ask questions, and gain new and additional knowledge.

Family Fest

Family Fest is an end-of-the-school year event to congratulate students for all of their hard work. The event features games, sports activities, touch-a-truck, performances, demonstrations, music, food trucks, and much more. All families are invited to enjoy and engage with other families and teachers from across the district and celebrate the end of the school year as a community.

Update on our Work with Kindergarten Teachers

On Wednesday, September 25, all of the district's kindergarten teachers gathered for the first of four days of professional development focused on developing a common understanding on play-based instruction, explicit instruction in literacy, and integrated units. Dr. Nicole Gittens, Dr. Mary Brown, and Dr. Regina Watts joined me in facilitating the day. It was a successful day and a good start to our work together this year.

After a short opening message in which I stressed the importance of making sure that all teachers could speak open and honestly, I clarified my earlier statement about reading levels in kindergarten by saying:

We are holding off having a specific reading level this year in kindergarten. No, B, C, D at this time. We will work together this year to identify what we will all use going forward. We'll start doing that in our second session. Things shouldn't change in your classrooms because of this. You should still be doing literacy instruction, still getting to know your children as readers, still identifying where they are to begin, the progress they are making, and when or if they are struggling and then figuring out if they need any additional support from you or anyone else on the team. This will likely take some modification of the progress report and maybe even how we do BAS, but we'll figure that out. For now, everyone should know that we're not using any specific level as the benchmark.

We started the day by developing guidelines for how the group would work together. This is a typical practice for effective teams. We used an exercise from our Restorative Practices work. In groups, teachers shared their schedules for the year and also came up with their ideal schedule. Teachers noticed that the schedules developed by the seven groups had remarkable similarities including what was taught and when. For example, all schedules began with Morning Meeting and followed it with time for literacy which typically began with Foundations. Math typically happened in the later morning. All of the schedules they developed included play/choice time and quiet time after lunch.

In the afternoon, we read articles about and discussed play-based learning with the aim of coming to a common understanding of play-based learning. The conversation was rich and interesting. While we did not come to a set definition of play-based learning, the group did discuss that there are many different versions of play-based learning that are used by our teachers at different times for varying purposes. One important question was how do teachers do the complex work of intentional play based learning that is tied to integrated units and deep learning. We will continue to delve into this question in our later sessions.

Overall we heard that the day was very positive. We collected Plus/Deltas at the end of the day so we can continue to improve the sessions and meet the teachers' needs. Teachers expressed appreciation for the chance to work together again this year and that they have time learn from each other.

DESE Visit to PSB's Therapeutic Learning Center

A few representatives from DESE were invited to visit our Therapeutic Learning Center, a K-8 district-wide program that serves students with social, emotional, and behaviorally challenges. Visiting the TLC program at Coolidge Corner School were Russell Johnston, Senior Associate Commissioner and State Director of Special Education, Nina Marchese, Director of the Office of Approved Special Education Schools, and Janelle Roberts, Special Education Monitoring Liaison from the Office of Approved Special Education Schools.

The visit included classroom observations and a discussion about program philosophy and approach to instruction and inclusion. TLC teachers Jackie Graham, Meghan Rhoads, and Andrew Schneider, Principal Jen Buller, TLC clinician Amy Burch, ETF Cecile Budelmann, hosted the visit along with Co-Director of Special Education Nadene Moll and Deputy Superintendent Casey Ngo-Miller.

During the debrief portion of the visit, Dr. Johnston and his staff commended the TLC program for its inclusivity and therapeutic approach. Highlights for he and his staff included meeting students, seeing evidence of paraprofessional training and differentiation. In particular, TLC teachers were called out for their expertise. The visit was both instructive, as staff received helpful feedback from the State Director of Special Education, but it was also gratifying as the DESE staff so openly appreciated their work.

Parent Communications

On September 16, I communicated with all parents and guardians to provide guidance for students who expressed an interest in participating in the international Climate Strike on September 20. I have

attached a copy of that letter for your information. I received a lot of positive feedback for our balanced approach to this situation.

I wrote to parents and guardians on September 23 to inform them of our final staff office changes. Many of the offices that our parents regularly contact – Special Education, English Learner Education, Registration and Enrollment – are now in new locations. We wanted to be sure that everyone was aware of their new location and reminded of the best way to contact them. A copy of that letter is also attached for your information.

School Visits

I had the pleasure of visiting 9th grade classrooms at **Old Lincoln School** on September 19 with Head of School Anthony Meyer. In addition to visiting classrooms, I also joined the team as they chaperoned the walk of students from OLS to 115 Greenough.

This morning I joined Dr. Sevelius in visiting several classrooms at **Heath School**.



The Public Schools of Brookline
Town Hall
333 Washington Street, 5th Floor
Brookline, Massachusetts 02445
617.730.2401

Ben Lummis
Interim Superintendent

September 16, 2019

Dear Families,

As you may have learned, students across the country are planning a Climate Strike on Friday, September 20, 2019. A number of PSB students have approached their teachers and school leaders to inform them of their intention to participate in this action.

To help our schools prepare for the possibility of a student walkout, I have shared the following information with our principals who will be sharing it with our school-based staff. At this time I want to share it with you, as well.

We are providing guidance in four areas:

- Schools can use this protest as a teachable moment
- Schools should provide a safe space for any student who chooses to gather and protest while ensuring that learning continues for all students who choose not to participate
- Any student who chooses to leave school grounds must be excused by a parent or guardian and may only leave school grounds when accompanied by a parent or guardian
- Schools need to provide a learning environment that is as free as possible from coercion, peer pressure, or pressure to conform to another individual's views

This is a teachable moment.

As our mission says, our schools have the responsibility to “ensure that every student develops the skills and knowledge to participate thoughtfully in a democracy.” As the date of the climate strike approaches, there are a number of critical lessons that we can help students learn about, including:

- student First Amendment rights, specifically as they pertain to free speech and peaceful assembly
- the balance between individual rights and responsibilities in a democracy
- the history of political movements in the United States that have included mass protests
- strategies designed to affect legislative change in addition to walkouts and political protests such as advocacy techniques and lobbying
- teaching about climate change, the risk it poses to our earth, and what can be done about it

We will provide a safe space for any student who chooses to participate in the protest as long as they remain on school grounds.

I have asked each school to designate a specific space for students to assemble safely outside of the school where they can be properly supervised at all times. Our staff cannot be responsible or stay with any students who choose to leave school grounds. If you want your student to leave school grounds during the day, you must follow our typical procedures for early dismissal by calling your school and letting them know you will be taking your student off of school grounds. Any student who leaves school grounds should be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

We will ensure that learning continues for all students who choose not to participate.

Schools will ensure that lessons will continue for students who choose to remain in class and that all students will be supervised.

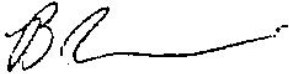
Schools need to provide a learning environment that is as free as possible from coercion, peer pressure, or pressure to conform to another individual's views.

It is essential that our schools maintain a culture that allows for and respects divergent viewpoints and where no one feels coerced or pressured to conform to views that are not their own. As public employees within the Public Schools of Brookline, our staff will neither encourage nor discourage student participation in a walkout. Whether or not any student decides to participate in any action should be their own choice and not be influenced by peers, a teacher, or other staff members. Educators are, however, encouraged to answer student questions as they decide the course of action they may take on September 20.

We are one school district, but we are also eight individual K-8 schools, one high school, and one early education program. We always aim to strike a balance between school autonomy and district-wide coherence. We hope you recognize that in a case such as this, there will be some variation in how each school plans for and approaches the September 20 Climate Strike. I am confident that no matter how each school plans and responds, it will be done in a caring, age-appropriate manner that supports the learning of all students.

If you feel it is appropriate for their age level, I encourage you to talk with your child(ren) about this important issue. If your student plans to participate in the walkout, please review the information above with them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'BL', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ben Lummis
Interim Superintendent



The Public Schools of Brookline
Town Hall
333 Washington Street, 5th Floor
Brookline, Massachusetts 02445
617.730.2401

Ben Lummis
Interim Superintendent

September 23, 2019

Dear PSB Parents and Guardians,

Last week, many of the school department offices that directly support families moved to new locations. I am writing to let you know about these moves in the event you need to reach out to any of our staff for assistance.

In July 2019, the School Committee had the opportunity to lease a 16-classroom school building from the Maimonides School located at 2 Clark Road, Brookline, as part of their ongoing effort to address overcrowding in our schools and to better serve our students. Three Brookline Early Education Program classrooms are already using the space at Clark Road. For the 2019-2020 school year, we will also temporarily have specific administrative offices in the Clark Road building.

Beginning today, staff located at the Brookline Education Resource Center on 24 Webster Place, and some staff located on the 4th floor of Town Hall, have moved to a new location. Please take a few minutes to review these changes summarized below:

Moving to Brookline Town Hall (333 Washington Street, Brookline, MA 02445)

- **Office of Registration and Enrollment (ORE, formerly the Office of Student Affairs):** All ORE staff and offices are now located on the 4th floor of Brookline Town Hall. Please direct inquiries to (617) 264-6492 or student_affairs@psbma.org.
 - Registration appointments for new families will be held on the 4th floor of Brookline Town Hall.
- **English Learner Education (ELE):** All ELE staff and offices are now located on the 4th floor of Brookline Town Hall. Inquiries about the ELE program can be directed to Mindy Paulo at (617) 264-6413 or mindy_paulo@psbma.org.
 - Students who require a language screening as part of the registration process will be assessed on the 4th floor of Brookline Town Hall.
- **METCO:** METCO administrative staff are now located on the 5th floor of Brookline Town Hall. Inquiries should be directed to Donna Scott at (617) 730-2464 or donna_scott@psbma.org.

Moving to the Clark Road Building (2 Clark Road, Brookline, MA, 02445)

- **Brookline Early Education Program (BEEP):** BEEP administrative offices, including admissions and tuition assistance, are now located at Clark Road. Please direct all inquiries to the BEEP office at (617) 713-5471 or beep@psbma.org.

- **Office of Student Services (OSS):** Special education directors and staff, and the Director of School Counseling, are now located at Clark Road. Please direct all inquiries to Natalie Greening at (617) 730-2440 or natalie_greening@psbma.org.
 - K-8 Families -- Individualization Education Plans (IEPs), 504 plans, and other special education records for BEEP and K-8 students may be accessed by families at our 2 Clark Road offices.
 - High School Families -- All special education documents relating to high school students (grades 9-12) remain accessible at the BHS Special Education Department at 115 Greenough Street.
- **Food Services, Student Transportation, Building Services, and Operations:** Administrative staff for these offices are now located at Clark Road.
 - Inquiries regarding food services (school lunch and breakfast) including menus and applications for the free and reduced meal program should be directed to Joanne Conneely at (617) 730-2415 or joanne_conneely@psbma.org.
 - Inquiries regarding student transportation, including bus and van transportation, should be directed to Evan Schwartz at (617) 730-2452 or evan_schwartz@psbma.org.
 - Inquiries about school building rentals during after-school hours should be directed to Lindsey Chapin at (617) 730-2453 or lindsey_chapin@psbma.org.
- **Brookline Adult & Community Education (BACE):** Administrative and financial offices for BACE are now located at Clark Road. Please direct all inquiries to (617) 730-2700 or bacep@psbma.org.
- **Steps to Success Brookline:** Administrative offices for Steps to Success are now located at Clark Road. Please direct all inquiries to (617) 713-5310 or sts@stepstosuccessbrookline.org.

All of our colleagues who moved to a new location are still unpacking boxes, so we appreciate your patience and understanding during this period of transition. We look forward to a successful school year together.

Sincerely,



Ben Lummis
Interim Superintendent