



January 25, 2019

Dear Parents,

As we close in on finishing our first week of the second semester and still have memory of the time we spent together in Winter Term fresh in mind, I am glad to be in touch as snow and colder weather settle in. The six weeks that stand between us and the beginning of spring break will be full of challenges and triumphs of all kinds. By the time we get to early March, we will have enjoyed a wide range of culminating events for our winter activities, the end of the third marking period will be upon us, and somehow spring afternoon activities will be underway. To stay in the moment and get as much as we possibly can out of this stretch of time is our hope.

Before turning to what is in front of us, I want to take some time to [look back at Winter Term](#) and how well the school has done since we all returned shortly after New Year's Day. While the nature of this year's calendar left us with just 14 teaching days during this eighth edition of Winter Term, the depth and range of experiences we all shared with one another at last Friday evening's symposium were impressive. As this program evolves over time, each year becomes somewhat distinct. There are always exciting new editions to the curriculum, and other courses that have stood the test of time. I was talking with one parent of a sixth-form student who was recalling how much his daughter had gotten out of the four Winter Term courses she had taken during her years here. All of them had her on her feet and engaging in subject matter extending well beyond what she experienced during our more traditional terms. While I recognize this is just one student's observation of Winter Term, the strength of my conviction about the worth and importance of this shift of mode in our year grows annually. The ways we learn during these few January weeks informs our thinking about teaching and learning throughout the year. As we begin to debrief on this year's Winter Term, we look forward to setting our sights on doing all we can to improve the program as we move from this year to next. This is exciting work and time well spent.

One of the many elements of Winter Term that I enjoy most is the flexibility we have to look at a school day differently, and invite guests and speakers to spend time with us without worry about fitting a visit into a tight window. A highlight of this Winter Term was Chris Herren's talk in the theater two weeks ago. For those who do not know his story, Chris grew up in Fall River, Mass., and was regarded as one of the finest high school basketball prospects in the country. He played collegiately and professionally, but also fell victim to drug and alcohol addiction that nearly took everything from him. He is now more than 10 years into recovery and shared his message with all of us. You could have heard a pin drop during his talk. From my seat, there were two especially compelling points he made within a sea of important messages certain to stick with those who were there. First, he encouraged all of us to think about who those suffering from addiction were before their illness took over, as opposed to thinking about them on their worst day. Second, he emphasized the critical importance of asking yourself "why" you are using drugs and alcohol before you do. This might seem fairly simple, but if all students who are using took the time to ask that question

and sit with an honest answer, I believe more would abstain. The evening left us with a lot to think about.

Before leaving the subject of Chris's talk, I do want to emphasize that he was here because Colin Khater '19 made it happen. Colin knew of Chris and approached the school with the idea of inviting him to speak at Brooks. Were it not for Colin thinking about ways that he could improve his school, we never would have had the privilege of this experience. I want to thank Colin for his wonderful introduction before Chris spoke, and for doing much more than his part to enrich this school year. It was a memorable night.

I noted in my last letter in December that our trustee meetings were scheduled to occur in the middle of Winter Term. This allowed all of us to get a firsthand look at the many courses we run for these three weeks. As we debriefed about our meetings at the end of our two days together, the time spent with teachers and students participating in and/or observing Winter Term classes was a highlight. We also had an opportunity to celebrate the completion of our Center for the Arts. It was fun to have so many who played such critical roles in making the building possible on campus to see it in a finished state for the first time. We spend a lot of time in these meetings looking ahead and aiming to move the school forward strategically and thoughtfully. In the midst of this work, it was nice to take time to experience the school in the moment and revel in progress we have made.

Earlier this week, we got the second semester off to a great start, and I was pleased to have an opportunity to speak in our opening Chapel service the day following the holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We have typically been in school during this holiday and have been able to pause together and contemplate the life and legacy of one of this country's most important and impressive figures. Dr. King is a personal hero of mine, and I was glad to have a chance to share why I feel that way with the school. My hope is that we move into the second semester carrying his message about justice and equality close to heart.

I am looking forward to seeing a number of you who are parents of fifth-form students at tonight's reception in our home to kick off your college counseling workshop on Saturday. As a past participant in this program, I am certain that you all will get a great deal out of time spent with our College Counseling Office and the many college admission officers who share their expertise and perspective with us. In my view, the process is an opportunity to engage with and support your child in an incredibly exciting endeavor. There are so many great schools to explore and so many good fits that are out there. We are excited to help you make sense of it all and believe the weekend will get us started in that direction.

Before closing, I would point to a few events on the calendar ahead of when I will next be in touch sometime in mid-February:

On Wednesday, February 6, I will travel to Durham, NC, for the annual meeting of The Headmasters Association. This is my third year as a member of the group, and the time and opportunity to share and interact with fellow heads of school from independent and public schools all across the country is a real treat. I am certain to return to campus with a lot of good food for thought. This year, however, I will be speaking about H. Peter Aitken at the memorial service held every year to remember heads of school who have passed away since the last meeting. Mr. Aitken was headmaster from 1973 to 1986 and passed away this past summer after a battle with brain cancer. His career and critical contributions to Brooks School's evolution are featured in the most recent edition of The Bulletin. I am looking forward to having the honor of remembering him well.

On Monday, February 11, we will be going full tilt with our [Giving Day](#) effort aimed at driving participation in the Brooks Fund to new levels. The hope here is to engage as many alumni, alumnae, and parents as we possibly can in a fun way to keep moving the school in the direction of achieving our annual giving goal. On Wednesday of that week, February 13, we will hold our [Boston Reception](#) at the University of Massachusetts Club at 6 p.m. We

hope many of you will be able to join faculty and alumni for what is always a great night. We will have more to share about both events as they draw closer.

The Wilder Speaking Prize contest will be getting underway as the second semester begins, and all of your children will have an opportunity to participate via their English classes. English teacher, John Haile, leads the effort, and this year's prompts for the talk students will give are two:

1. The future is no more uncertain than the present.
2. "The past is always tense, the future perfect." (Zadie Smith)

Over the years, this contest has been a terrific way to introduce occasionally reticent students to public speaking, and we hope you will encourage your children to push through whatever discomfort might have them holding back. We will move toward a final round of speakers over the course of February, and have a winner selected before we go to spring break.

To close, I will be on the move a fair amount once early February rolls around with conferences and some visiting with alumni, alumnae, and prospective families in North Carolina, Florida, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seoul, and Hong Kong over the span of about five weeks. I am looking forward to seeing some of you along the way, and to catching up a number of people about the school's strong state and ambitious hopes for the future.

Finally, I cannot possibly bring this letter to a close without commenting on yet another New England Patriots run to the Super Bowl. After this past Sunday's incredible win over the Kansas City Chiefs, there seems to be nothing beyond this team's reach. I am hopeful that we will have plenty to celebrate the evening of Sunday, February 3 -- at least for those of us who love the Patriots!

I hope to stay in touch as the winter moves along, and please feel free to reach out to me regarding anything that is on your mind. Take good care.

Best,

John R. Packard
Head of School

Brooks School
1160 Great Pond Road, North Andover, MA 01845

See what's happening on our social sites

