



September 18, 2018

Dear Parents,

A handful of days have elapsed since we were first in touch on Thursday of last week regarding the gas leaks and fires in the Andover/Lawrence/North Andover area. I am glad to have this opportunity to follow up. We continue to be extremely appreciative of the support and attention you provided during the acute phase of this crisis. Your kind words and thoughtful suggestions have been both reassuring and helpful.

We also appreciate the fact that some in our community are still experiencing the impact of this catastrophe, and the weight and magnitude of the event lingers for them. With this in mind, I would share three points I touched on with students and faculty at the start of the week: First, we have no reason to believe that our campus is unsafe. We did not turn the gas back on and return to normal operations until we received clearance to do so from local officials. To be clear about this point has felt important. Second, we have been explicit in encouraging students to seek support from our counselors and other adults in the community who are here to help them. If your child is struggling in any way, please let us know. Third, we will find ways to engage in the recovery effort in this region. We have started by collecting food and clothing for those in need, and will look for additional ways to contribute. In sum, this was a stressful and unnerving situation. To work with your children through whatever feelings they might still be carrying about the event is our goal.

To find some rhythm and routine in the first few weeks of a school year is difficult under any circumstances, and there is no question that the past week's event has strained the school in this regard. Nevertheless, I want to report that your children have done incredibly well in and out of the classroom since they arrived. We all experience a bit of sensory overload during these early days with classes, activities, and the pace we keep conspiring to tire us out. While the early going is disjointed in a number of ways, the rhythm and routine that eludes us will take hold and feel increasingly familiar over the next couple of weeks.

After many of you had moved the final box or bag of your child's belongings into various dormitory rooms and departed two weeks ago, we had a nice opening dinner and evening together. We started first thing the next morning in the Ashburn Chapel, which is always one of my favorite moments of the year. To have the entire student body and faculty together with so much hope and optimism in circulation at the same time makes for a special occasion. From there, we started classes and afternoon activities, continued some orientation for new students, and even enjoyed a record number of students at the club fair that week! This high level of engagement continued into our first weekend with our country-themed Saturday night event drawing lots of students to a square dance and a nice time with one another. After a good night's sleep, we had some fun field day activities the following afternoon. The tug-of-war was particularly competitive!

While these events and moments were all a lot of fun, we are also keenly aware of the fact

that the adjustment to school for new and returning students involves ups and downs. For new students, it takes time to get settled and to feel the sense of belonging at Brooks that students who have been here for a few years already feel. To be yearning for what has been left behind is normal and healthy, and we hope you will let us know how we can be helpful as your child's transition continues. For returning students, there are new challenges to overcome and some uncertainty about how things will unfold. Here, too, we are eager to partner with you and your child in ways that move them in the direction of goals and aspirations they have set for 2018-2019.

In this spirit, our senior prefects, Jadie DeLeon '19 and Connor Silva '19, delivered a fantastic chapel talk reflecting on their own beginning and journey through the school on Monday of last week. In their characteristically mature and thoughtful way, both of them recalled how they felt when they started at Brooks as third-formers. They shared some wonderful advice for new students about trying new things and trusting the community to care about them along the way. The tone was encouraging, welcoming, and reassuring, which bodes well for the types of leaders they and others in the class of 2019 will be throughout the year.

With the urgency of the gas and fire situation in the area behind us, my wife, Kim, and I were excited to open our home on Saturday night for our first open house of the year. We had a lot of cookie dough, snacks, and games for all to enjoy, and the much anticipated calzone delivery took place at 10 p.m. The feeding frenzy that followed would be difficult to put into words! It was a lot of fun.

While all of us eagerly anticipate being able to hold All-School Meeting in our soon-to-be completed and spectacular Center for the Arts, we held our first such meeting of the year in the Wilder Dining Hall this morning. The meeting is run by the senior prefects, and we normally hold it on Friday mornings in order to come together as a community, share some news and announcements with one another, and take a look at what is to come on the weekend. With classes canceled this past Friday, we moved the meeting to today.

In this first All-School Meeting of the year, I covered a wide range of school and community topics. The following are some of the highlights of what I shared:

- I introduced the 10 new members of the faculty who are quickly becoming known to all of our students in and out of the classroom. Dean of Faculty John McVeigh prepared bios of each of them that you can find [HERE](#).
- I had the privilege of awarding prizes to the previous year's ranking scholars in the classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021. This year's recipients include Spencer Pierce '19, Tobey Smith '20, and Anya Sanchorawala '21. Congratulations to all of them! The 2017-2018 ranking scholar in the school was Diane Lee '18 who is busy getting her undergraduate career started at Johns Hopkins University!
- I spent some time outlining the school's disciplinary process and the sorts of consequences students should expect if they are in violation of major school rules. In addition to sharing the rules themselves, which can be located on pages 27-28 of the [Student Handbook](#), I emphasized that our rules are in place to keep our students and your children safe and in position to maximize the experience they have while here. The Food and Drug Administration has recently characterized teenage use of electronic cigarettes as reaching "an epidemic proportion," and I underlined that we added the possession or use of vaping devices or any tobacco product to our major school rules in the spring of last year.
- I covered the school's commitment to doing all it can to ensure respectful and healthy relationships between students, including reference to our position on sexual intimacy and consent found on pages 34-35 in the [Student Handbook](#).
- I made clear my expectation that we are kind and good to one another at all times and that mean behavior has no place at our school.
- In the technological realm, I shared some thinking on smartphone use and our annual

push to steer ourselves away from staring at screens when we have opportunity to be present with one another. Along the same lines, we have moved to making group email lists available only to some student leaders this year with hope that we will find more personal and effective ways to share news and announcements as the year moves along.

With some of the weightier topics I felt a need to cover in this first school meeting behind me, I turned to my annual introduction of the Hello Campaign. For those not familiar with this September effort, it is aimed at working hard at the start of the year to get to know one another by making sure we say hello as we move about our beautiful campus. To get things started in style, I participated in a skit with the senior prefects and made my annual pledge to know everyone's name. For new students and student leaders, we will hold the 8th annual Nametag Party in my home one week from tonight. This party marks the end of the grace period I allow myself to learn the names of new students. In addition, it marks the beginning of when any new student can ask me whether I know their name and receive \$5 in Brooks School currency (redeemable in the school store or snack shack) if I fail to answer correctly. This is already live with returning students who want to test my recall of their names, and you might want to encourage your child to try if they are interested in those Brooks School \$5 bills! All told, this is a lot of fun and helps expedite some important community building as we get started.

Later this week, the Board of Trustees will be on campus for meetings stretching from Thursday afternoon to lunch on Saturday. We hold these meetings three times per year, and have moved from an October/February/June sequence to a September/January/April sequence this year. This particular set of meetings will allow us to look back at what The Campaign for Brooks has achieved, take a close look at the nearly finished Center for the Arts, and look ahead to some goals we have for the year.

I will be traveling to New York next week for an admission reception at the home of Susan and Ace Crary P'16, P'20 on Thursday, September 27, at 6:30 p.m. This will be a nice opportunity to connect with prospective students and families, so please do direct any friends and family members living in the area and thinking about Brooks to this event. I will also see a few alums while I am there and will make my way back to campus for the first Parents Committee meeting of the year on Friday, September 28, at 4:30 p.m. The Robert Lehman Art Center show, Friends and Family, will officially open that Friday evening at 7 p.m., and the Nametag Party follows a bit later that night. A full day!

We will pick right up on Saturday, September 29, with Homecoming activities drawing a number of alums back to campus, and lots of athletic contests and an admission open house during the afternoon. Thank you in advance to the many of you who volunteer for the admission open house. It makes an enormous difference to have current parents on campus and able to share that perspective with families who might be here for the first time.

A highlight of the afternoon will involve our Athletic Hall of Fame induction ceremonies at 3:30 p.m. under a tent near Anna K. Trustey Memorial Field. Another full day! Finally, we will hold an admission reception at Essex County Club in Manchester-by-the-Sea, Massachusetts, at 6:30 p.m., on Thursday, October 4. Denise and Graham Marks P'19 will be our hosts, and we look forward to meeting as many families thinking about Brooks as we possibly can.

Clearly, we have an ambitious schedule laid out for these remaining September and early October days. There is a lot to be excited about. I will look forward to being in touch again in early October, as the leaves begin to turn and we are in full stride. Until then, please do be in touch with the school or me with questions and anything else we can do to be helpful as the year gets moving. We are glad to be underway!

Best,

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Head of School

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