



October 4, 2017

Dear Parents,

It will come as no surprise that I think every month at Brooks School is a great month. However, I also think that October might be the best month of all. With lots of energy and enthusiasm in circulation, beautiful fall days taking hold, and a full calendar of events lined up, we are uniquely positioned at this time of year to get a lot of good work done. With your children facing their first wave of tests, papers, and assessments last week and this week, we are now pushing into the heart of the fall, intent on getting as much out of this stretch as we can. This is a super time of year to be at Brooks!

We finished September in impressive form, and it was fun to spend time with some of you at our first Parents Committee meeting. While there will certainly be plenty to talk and think about through the year, I was pleased to have an opportunity to touch on a few areas that are on our minds as we settle into the year. For those who were not able to make the meeting in person, here is some of what we covered in our conversation:

A fair amount of our discussion centered on *The Atlantic* article I referenced in my last letter: "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?" With an eye on trying to find some common ground upon which we might engage more effectively in the challenges the article highlighted, we devoted our faculty meeting earlier this week to phones, in particular, and technology wants and needs, in general. As we move forward, my hope is that we can illuminate how we are using technology and bandwidth at Brooks, and perhaps add some additional times and places where we will recognize and appreciate reasons for limiting our screen and cell phone use. I do not anticipate quick remedies or universal agreement, as that seems beyond reach, but I do think that we can make some progress based on a premise that our community experience is diminished when it tips too heavily in the direction of recreational technology and phone use. I am looking forward to staying in this conversation.

I noted that we are planning to focus on the school value of integrity at points through the year in Chapel. On Thursday of last week, our academic dean, Susanna Waters, spoke on the subject and shared excellent insight and perspective on why integrity matters as much as it does in the classroom. To revisit this theme throughout the year allows us an opportunity to underline why honesty, character and strong moral principle matter as much as they do to us. A great deal of what happens at Brooks depends on being able to build trust and goodwill through the year. To hear students and faculty members speak about the importance of integrity in their lives and in the school's life will help us do just that.

Another theme that we will revisit through the year is socioeconomic status and difference. This will be the focal point of our Unity Day activities later in the year, and we are planning to draw some speakers to school ahead of that point to look at poverty and the many socioeconomic strata that exist in the United States and around the world. While there are lots of reasons to explore this subject as a school this year, I would highlight two that are front of mind for me: First, the constitution of the current Brooks School community has never had more socioeconomic difference and depth to it than it does now. To illuminate that thoughtfully and sensitively in ways that allow us to better understand the challenges this presents across our school is a goal. Second, with the ability to be in constructive discourse in this country under such strain, my hope is that an intentional look at poverty and socioeconomic difference will allow us a way into some dialogue and tangential conversations that are important to try to stay in. I am looking forward to what we will learn together.

Finally, we did spend a bit of time sharing some thought on the early going of the school's dress code. I continue to appreciate that a range of opinion exists about what we wear to school and have been pleased at how we have engaged in the current approach. There are always kinks to work out, and tweaks here and there will likely come, but the compromise that we have settled on has felt and looked good to me. I hope that routines within the considerable parameters of this dress code are feeling increasingly clear to your children.

We followed the Parents Committee meeting with our Brooks Together launch event later that evening, and we are grateful for the time a number of you made and will make to be part of this important effort. The hope is to earn your participation in our annual giving program, or Brooks Fund, at levels that are within your reach and that ensure our ability to be the school we set out to be in September. As I noted at the event, roughly \$1 out of every \$10 that is spent to run the school on an annual basis comes from the Brooks Fund, and the impact of giving in this way is immediate. Your support in so many generous and important ways enhances the experience our students and your children have. To celebrate the depth and breadth of your impact when Thanksgiving vacation arrives is the goal.

As we look ahead and think further about opportunities to spend time with all of you, we are excited about Parents Weekend, scheduled to get under way in just over two weeks. By now, I trust that you have received the schedule and program, and have squared away plans to be here that weekend. We get started with third- and fourth-form parents on Thursday, October 19, at 7:30 p.m., in the lower level of the science building, and wrap up with games and afternoon activities on Saturday, October 21. Of particular note this year is the Parent Summit we will be holding on Friday, October 20, beginning at 8:30 a.m. in the upper level of the science building. We held larger events of this sort for the whole school constituency at earlier stages in The Campaign for Brooks and realize that many of you were not yet Brooks School parents at that point. To spend some time sharing with you why we have pursued this effort at this point in the school's history is our hope.

The week prior to Parents Weekend, we will welcome the school's board of trustees to campus for two days of meetings on Friday, October 13, and Saturday, October 14. We always have a full agenda when we gather in the fall and will certainly be taking stock of how things are coming along with the Center for the Arts. A highlight of the weekend will be having dinner on Friday evening with about 50 student leaders joining us for some conversation about their experiences at Brooks. To make time to allow students to share all that they are doing so well with the school's trustees is important, and doing so over dinner will be great. As soon as we finish our meetings at noon on Saturday, we will

transition to our Homecoming that Saturday afternoon with a full slate of games and activities for alumni and alumnae to participate in and enjoy. It is fun to have alums back on campus at points in the year outside of our Alumni Weekend in the spring, and we will keep our fingers crossed for some perfect fall weather.

Before closing, I do want to note that the school's discipline committee met last Saturday to consider a violation of the school's major rule concerning drug and alcohol use. As I shared with all students during our first school meeting a few weeks back, major school rule violations typically lead to either a suspension or dismissal. In this case, the student was suspended from school for the balance of the school year with hope for a successful return in the fall. I appreciate that all discipline decisions reverberate in different ways amongst your children. If you have questions that I can help with, please let me know.

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to the next exhibit in the Robert Lehman Art Center. "The Insanity of Violence," featuring Gordon D. Chase's work, will have its opening reception on Thursday, October 12, at 7 p.m. Throughout his life, Mr. Chase has worked in independent schools and sought to promote "art with a social conscience." The show will remain up through Friday, November 17, and we hope you will have a chance to enjoy it between now and then.

I have managed to hold onto most of the \$5 gift certificates I have on my person every day in order to fulfill my pledge to give them away to students whose names I do not remember. We are well on our way to knowing one another well - as important a pursuit as any at Brooks.

Take care, and please do be in touch if I can help with any questions or thoughts that are on your mind.

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

