



December 18, 2019

Dear Parents,

I hope the holiday season is in full swing as you close in on winter vacation and more time with your Brooks School children than the run of school ordinarily permits. While we have certainly had our fair share of cold, snowy, and unsettled weather to battle during these few December weeks, teachers and students have done well to push as hard as they can to finish the semester well. There will be a collective sigh of relief at some point today with exams wrapping up and all of us moving that much closer to a well-deserved break. With our Lessons and Carols service for the whole school on deck for tomorrow evening, we are poised to have a fun and joyful finish to what has been a great semester together. To carry that good feeling into Winter Term and 2020 will be the goal.

Before taking a look at what awaits us on the other side of the holidays, I do want to point out at least some of what stands out in my mind when reflecting on the past few weeks.

I noted in my last letter to all of you that I was headed to the West Coast when your children were returning to school following Thanksgiving Break. After a short stop in San Francisco to see some Brooks School alums and friends, I made my way north to Seattle to join five colleagues and six students who attended the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) People of Color Conference (POCC). This was my second time attending this conference, but it had been 12 years since my last one. I cannot come anywhere near to capturing in this one letter all that I am continuing to process from time spent in engaging workshops and listening to outstanding speakers. Yet, I can say that I returned to Brooks with renewed energy regarding the importance of fostering equity, inclusion, and belonging, for all members of our school community. The fact that all of us experience life at Brooks differently is made clear at POCC in ways that resonate. Looking forward, I returned feeling a charge to do all we can to be intentional about growing our collective understanding of and appreciation for these differences. The challenges of this work open up so many wonderful possibilities to learn and grow. It was a terrific conference.

The drawback of traveling is that I miss all that is going on here while away. This particular trip kept me from having a chance to hear from Diane Foley during our first week back, as she spoke in the Robert Lehman Art Center and in Chapel over the course of a couple of days. Her photograph was part of the [200 Women Who Will Change the Way You See the World](#) exhibit that has just come down. I doubt anyone who spent time with her and her story of losing her journalist son to ISIS violence in Syria will soon forget the experience. We were so glad and fortunate to have Diane and this incredible exhibit at Brooks through the fall and early winter.

I returned in time to enjoy the rock bands on the first Saturday night we were back after Thanksgiving, and was glad to see a number of you there. This was followed by our Jazz Band Concert this past Friday evening with two more bands sharing what they have been

working on this fall, and the sum total of these two concerts was impressive. As we settle into our Center for the Arts, it is so nice to have a steady slate of concerts and performances to enjoy in our theater. There will be more to come in 2020!

In between these two concerts, many of us enjoyed hearing from students who were enrolled in our Oratory class this fall. The combination of very personal and powerful messages being shared by students who are overcoming some degree of apprehension about public speaking makes for a memorable evening. I was glad many of you were able to attend and see your children and some of their friends do so well. We are looking forward to all the student talks still to come over the second half of the year.

Ahead of the first exam on Monday afternoon of this week, we tried to build some stress-reducing activities into the weekend's program. A number of students dropped by our home on Saturday night for an open house, which allowed some to step away from studying and enjoy calzones and good company. On Sunday, we had our annual session with [Barn Babies](#), a traveling petting zoo, and enjoyed the time we had holding and playing with a wide range of small and irresistibly cute animals. This event continues to be a big hit! Finally, later in the afternoon, we held our Lessons and Carols service for the extended school community in Ashburn Chapel. It was both fun and uplifting to be with a number of you, family members, alums, and friends, with the holiday spirit in the air. All told, we hope some or all of these activities provided a bit of a break in a weekend filled with studying.

Looking ahead, we will return to the dormitories on Monday, January 6, and get started with our ninth edition of [Winter Term](#) the next morning. This has proven to be a great way to start every new calendar year at Brooks, and we all enjoy being in this mode for a few weeks in January. The opportunity we have to immerse ourselves in a subject area and passion with larger blocks of time at our disposal is great fun. We will be excited to hit the ground running with more early January bounce in our step than most schools have in the depths of a New England winter!

At the end of our first week of Winter Term, the school's board of trustees will be on campus for two days of meetings on Friday, January 10, and Saturday, January 11. With budget planning for next year well underway, we will be setting tuition levels, a financial aid budget, and our employee compensation pool for the coming year. In addition, we will continue to look at a range of campus project possibilities that we hope to begin working on at the end of the year. There will be more to share on this front as plans and schedules for these projects come into view. Finally, we will find some time to allow trustees to explore Winter Term courses in action, and hear from the group of students who attended POCC in Seattle. In sum, we have a full agenda and are eager to experience the school in the moment as we think together about ways to keep moving it forward.

On the other side of board meetings, we will move into the heart of Winter Term and take a brief break to welcome author Dean Karnazes to campus to speak to all of us on Tuesday, January 14, at 7:30 p.m. The World Languages Department was tasked with choosing this year's all-school read, and they selected *The Road to Sparta*. It will be exciting to bring to campus the author of a book all of us will be familiar with, and I am certain we will get a great deal out of the experience. You can learn more about Dean Karnazes and his inspirational book [HERE](#).

On Monday, January 20, we will celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day with a full day of programming. The theme for the day will center on "Being Your Authentic Self" and will begin in Ashburn Chapel with a talk by social justice education scholar Jamila Lysicott. She will lead us into some conversation about this theme throughout the day in workshops and conversations. You can learn more about Ms. Lysicott [HERE](#). We believe we are on our way to a day that will honor Dr. King's legacy and give all of us a lot to think about beyond the day itself.

Later that week, Winter Term will conclude with our Symposium on Friday, January 24, at 7 p.m., in the academic building. This culminating event will allow you to get a feel for what your child's class was up to over the course of this three-weeks stretch. It is fun to see all the different ways these experiences come together and are shared with those interested in learning more about them. We have the opportunity to learn differently during Winter Term. The Symposium will make it clear that we have taken full advantage of that opportunity!

Finally, with the end of the calendar year nearly upon us, I want to thank the many of you who have already made a Brooks Fund gift. If you would like to make a gift before 2019 comes to a close you can do so [HERE](#). I have noted before and will note again our desire to earn your support and participation by virtue of the work we all do with your children. I thank you for considering a gift in support of ensuring our ability to do that work as well as we can.

I will be in touch again at some point before the second semester gets underway on Tuesday, January 28. Until then, I wish you a wonderful holiday season.

Best,

John R. Packard
Head of School

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