



December 15, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As we near the end of this relatively short stretch of school between Thanksgiving and the winter holidays, I am glad to have this opportunity to check in. The winter season is off to a good start, and we have much to look forward to when we return to school in early January. After spending this part of December last year on computer screens, we have thoroughly enjoyed being together on campus with the full breadth of our program within reach. These early winter weeks have been terrific, and we are determined to continue doing all we can to remain in an in-person mode. There is no substitute for being together in a classroom, and this year has been evidence of that. We are excited about what lies ahead!

While your child has surely been busy finishing up academic work and getting through the Exhibitions of Learning we have been engaged in since Saturday, we have also enjoyed a number of events and gatherings showcasing different talents and passions in our midst. As I look back over these few weeks, here is some of what we feel good about:

- This is the first opportunity I have had in writing to congratulate our New England champion field hockey team! This group had a super run through the tournament right before Thanksgiving, and included so many student-athletes who play multiple sports at Brooks. At a time when some argue on behalf of specializing in just one sport, this team was full of athletes who excel in the fall, winter, and spring. It was so much fun to see them succeed and so clearly enjoy playing with and for one another. Congratulations!
- We were glad to welcome Julie Tucci to Chapel on Monday of last week to talk about healthy eating habits. She is a registered dietician and joined a number of Self-In-Community classes through the week to engage in smaller group discussions. Our hope is that Julie's counsel will be helpful to all of us moving into the new year.
- On Monday and Thursday of last week, we were treated to Oratory class final speeches in Ashburn Chapel. I always draw so much from what students enrolled in this course choose to share with family, friends, and faculty members who attend. This year was no exception to that rule and the speakers were terrific.
- Our Rock Band performed on Tuesday of last week in the Black Box in the Center for the Arts. This was followed by the Advanced Jazz Band performing in the Theater on Wednesday night of last week. Both groups were impressive and played beautifully while clearly having a lot of fun with one another.
- Throughout this first dose of winter, we have been able to enjoy *Surviving a Pandemic With Creativity* in The Robert Lehman Art Center. The exhibit will remain up through January 2, 2022, and features select works from the cartoon collection and original glass work by Robin Lehman '55. If you have time to take a quick look when picking up your child on Friday, I would recommend checking it out!

We are also very much looking forward to holding our traditional Lessons and Carols service tomorrow evening before we depart for Winter Break. And, we will have a number of varsity athletic teams competing in winter holiday tournaments at the beginning of the break. These experiences were not possible last December, and it has been great to be able to run our whole

program at this time of year -- a huge step forward!

As we look ahead to being together again in 2022, we are incredibly excited to be heading in the direction of a full Winter Term beginning with an opening Chapel first thing in the morning on Tuesday, January 4. After missing out on this experience last year, about half of our students and many faculty members will be experiencing this nearly three-week window in our school year for the first time. Our hope is that the pandemic will not get in the way of realizing the immersive and experiential nature of Winter Term, and we are going to do all we can to give ourselves the greatest likelihood of that happening. This aspiration has us thinking about how best to reenter school on Monday, January 3, when boarding students will return to the dormitories. Here is some of what we are planning for:

- We will be administering PCR tests to all employees and students when we return to school on Monday, January 3 (employees and boarding students), and Tuesday, January 4 (day students). In addition, we are strongly encouraging all employees and students to get tested on their own at some point on or after Thursday, December 30, and before returning to work or school. This additional test could be an antigen/rapid test or PCR test, as long as it produces a result ahead of one being back on campus.
- We are engaging in these layers of testing to do all we can to return to school safely and with as few positive cases and close contacts as we can. If at all possible, it is better for all involved to know whether one is positive before getting to campus in order to avoid having to figure out the 10-day isolation period required of anyone who tests positive. As a reminder, our capacity to have students isolate on campus is extremely limited.
- With the exception of dormitories, we will be extending our indoor mask requirement when we return from the break and will continue to ask students to refrain from being in dormitories they do not live in. We will continue to monitor both approaches and make adjustments when we feel it is safe to do so.
- As I indicated in my last letter, we have required all employees without an approved exemption to receive a COVID-19 vaccine booster shot before we return from spring vacation, and many have already done so. While all students who are not yet 16 years old remain ineligible for a booster, we were pleased to see the Pfizer booster gain approval for all who have reached their 16th birthday and are six months or more removed from their last COVID-19 vaccine dose. We are planning to offer a booster clinic for students on campus after Winter Break. If your child is currently eligible, however, we strongly encourage you to make arrangements for a booster while on Winter Break. It is becoming increasingly clear that boosters provide additional and substantial protection against the omicron variant and the most adverse effects of COVID-19.
- We will continue to ask that all spectators attending any indoor Brooks School event be fully vaccinated and wear a mask over the nose and mouth. As has been the case since the year's beginning, we are not allowing unvaccinated people into any school building without explicit permission from the school.

It is our hope that the current increase in new cases in New England and many parts of the United States will decline through January and February. Regardless, we want to do all we can to keep our whole program running safely through what continues to be an unpredictable and variable public health situation. We continue to be grateful for your partnership in that effort and will look forward to staying in touch as we head for Winter Term and the second semester.

For now, I hope this Winter Break allows for some extended time with your Brooks School child or children, along with family and friends. If you have questions or concerns you would like to discuss, please let me know. Have a wonderful holiday season.

Best,

John R. Packard
Head of School