



February 16, 2018

Dear Parents,

I hope all of you are well as we move further into the winter and have glimpses of spring emerging here and there. In my view, we have gotten off to a great start to the second semester and have found a nice rhythm through these colder and darker days. When I welcome new students and families to Brooks each fall, I tend to name the enthusiasm and energy that characterizes the beginning of the school year. I also often suggest that we might not have as much bounce in our step by the time we get to mid-February. Thus, the incredible burst of enthusiasm that almost blew the roof off the Ashburn Chapel when I called a slightly extended Head of School's holiday earlier this week was a sight to see. We will aim to ride that enthusiasm all the way to the beginning of spring vacation!

I have been on the move a fair amount since we all returned to classes following a short break after Winter Term, and trips to California and North Carolina were both fun and productive. While in Los Angeles and San Francisco, I was able to visit with a number of alumni, alumnae, and friends of the school. This trip preceded our Boston Reception earlier this month, and all of these occasions provide such enjoyable opportunities to connect with Brooksians spanning the generations. When speaking at these events, I find it extremely challenging to adequately convey all that we feel so good about when reflecting on the work and accomplishments of your children and today's Brooks School. To encapsulate all that we do with our students into a brief set of remarks never feels within reach, and it is the volume of good work that students and colleagues achieve together that leaves me feeling that way.

My trip to North Carolina was to attend a meeting of The Headmaster's Association with a number of colleagues serving in roles comparable to mine at independent and public secondary schools across the country. Aside from appreciating the incredible privilege we all have to lead and work with extraordinary educators and students at our schools, we also draw a great deal from the program and camaraderie that we experience together. The theme of this year's meeting, The Shift in World Power, allowed us to hear from four different speakers who offered a range of perspectives on America's evolving place in the world, and also shared some thoughts on the state of discourse in the United States. I returned to school following these two days away energized and thinking a lot about how important it is to try to be good and empathic listeners at a point in time when this country's will and ability to focus on hearing one another seems so strained. Ultimately, the speakers' messages were aimed at the critical importance of teaching and fostering good citizenship. To do well in this regard, through the balance of the year and beyond, will continue to be our goal.

During the first weekend in February, we welcomed our Board of Trustees to campus for two days of meetings that proved to be extremely productive. It was great fun to tour the Center for the Arts and get a feel for all that building will add to the experience we have at Brooks. We continue to make tangible progress in growing our financial aid capacity and anticipate extending our reach even further in the coming year. We are in good conversations about teaching and learning in ways that will add to the experience all students have in the classroom. We are pushing as hard as we can in the direction of finishing well with The Campaign for Brooks, which is directed at deepening the experience your children have here. While there are plenty of challenges, our school remains incredibly fortunate to have so many committed to meeting and exceeding them.

Unfortunately, in between our trustee meetings and my trip to North Carolina, we had a disciplinary incident involving a student using marijuana via a vaping device. After some deliberation and consideration of the student's circumstances, we determined that the student should be suspended for the balance of the school year. As I have noted before, these decisions are difficult and always reverberate within the school community. Ultimately, when students engage in behavior that is in violation of our major school rules, and compromise our ability to take good care of them, we need to move in a direction that provides a better chance at disrupting the behavior. We made this decision in that spirit.

You may recall that my last letter addressed our growing concern about vaping devices, and our plan to elevate our level of engagement. We have had a series of smaller conversations across a number of our Self-In-Community classes during the first few weeks of the second semester, and will continue to raise awareness about the harmful effects of vaping use. In so doing, it is our hope that we succeed in increasing the volume of non-disciplinary conversations we have with students aimed at reducing and eliminating use. We intend to stay on point in this regard, and to make clear that students can get help with their use from our Health & Wellness Center. Furthermore, we are continuing to move in a direction of making the possession and/or use of a vaping device and/or any tobacco product a major school rule. At present, we are planning to make this change when we return from spring vacation. If you have any questions, please let me know.

In terms of more recent news and events, along with what lies ahead prior to March break, I would share the following:

If you have not yet had a chance to visit the Robert Lehman Art Center to enjoy the work of Cynthia Packard (no relation!), along with the work of students enrolled in Lehman Director Amy Graham's Winter Term class, I do hope you will. As Amy explained during the show's opening last Friday, some of our students had time and opportunity to be practicing artists during Winter Term, and they produced some really interesting and impressive work. It is nice to see students inspired by that work and sharing their own!

While the official results of our Giving Day effort on Tuesday are still being tallied, we were thrilled to receive far more gifts to the school's Brooks Fund than our goal of 378. For those of you who gave on Tuesday, or at an earlier point in the year through our Brooks Together effort, I want to thank you for that support. While the dollars do matter and comprise about 10 percent of what we need each year to operate the school, it is your participation and that of alumni and alumnae that make the difference. We still have a lot of work to do in order to reach our Brooks Fund goal by June 30, but we took a big step in that direction this week. Many thanks!

This year's winter musical, Xanadu, opened at The Pike School Auditorium last night and

will run again tonight and tomorrow at 7:30 p.m. In a year when our own theater is under construction, the company has worked hard to pull this show together in far from optimal circumstances. We are also deeply grateful to Pike for making their beautiful auditorium available to us. It was great to have so many students take the bus to see the show last night, and we would love to have two more big crowds before the show concludes tomorrow. The doors open at 7:15 p.m., and we hope you can make it!

It is also worth noting that we are holding the 100-Day Lunch today for the class of 2018 as the countdown to Prize Day continues. Of course, there is much more to come for them as we move into the spring, and celebrating all they have given to and achieved at Brooks will be fun. By now, we hope that those of you who have a child in the class of 2018 have received information regarding our Lawn Ceremony and Prize Day on Commencement Weekend, and we stand ready to answer questions you may have between now and then. It will be a great weekend!

As we look a bit further into the future, we are just over one week away from the final regular season games for our winter athletic teams, and are expecting to have a couple of teams playing in New England tournaments the following week. Believe it or not, our spring athletic season begins on the last day of February, and our fingers are crossed that we might even be able to get outside onto our turf field for some practices before spring vacation. During that first week of spring athletics, I will be in Florida for a couple of days visiting with some Brooks School graduates and friends. We are having a reception in North Palm Beach on Monday, February 26, at 5:30 p.m. Our host will be Liz Chace W'52, P'88, GP'09, GP'11, and we have a nice group of folks attending. If you are in the Palm Beach area during that time, we hope you will be able to join us.

As you know, our spring vacation begins on Wednesday, March 7, and I will be in Atlanta for the better part of that week visiting with some alumni and alumnae, and attending the National Association of Independent Schools Annual Conference. This is always an excellent conference, and I am sure that I will return to Brooks with plenty of good food for thought over the few weeks we have off in March. I will aim to be in touch again around that time.

Before closing, I want to highlight the work a number of you are doing in beginning to coordinate this year's Community Appreciation Lunch on Monday, March 26, at 11:30 a.m., in the Wilder Dining Hall. I was traveling when this was held last year, and missed out on what is without question my favorite lunch of the year! While not at all helpful to any dieting aspirations I have, we are all so appreciative of the time and culinary talent so many of you share with all of us who work at Brooks. Let this be my first thank you for all the work you will do to pull that generous event together.

Take care and I will look forward to seeing you on campus!

Best,

John R. Packard
Head of School

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