



July 13, 2017

Dear Parents,

By now, I hope all of you are well into a summer routine and enjoying more family time than is typically within reach during the fall, winter and spring. The middle of July has a tendency to sneak up on us, and here we are turning our attention to 2017-2018. In the midst of a lot of information that has been and will be headed your way, I have two hopes with what follows:

First, I would like to update you on the construction work that is taking place on campus. We are excited to be making tangible progress on the new Center for the Arts and a new student center.

Second, I would like to spend some time sharing my thinking on a few shifts in approach that will begin with the 2017-2018 school year. While revisions to the school's dress code are primary on my mind, there are a couple of other steps that we will be taking in the fall that I would like to bring to your attention.

Ahead of getting into this range of subjects, however, I want to start by extending a warm welcome to all of you who are new parents at Brooks. We are thrilled to be on the verge of working with you, learning from you, and sharing with you the years ahead for your daughter or son. While my wife, Kim, and I have an older daughter, Kate, who will be beginning her sixth-form year this fall, we also have a younger daughter, Elizabeth, who will be starting at Brooks with your sons and daughters. A combination of excitement and nervousness will grow as Labor Day approaches, and we want to be as helpful as we can with the transition ahead. Please do be in touch if and when questions emerge. There is no such thing as a question not worth asking.

I will write a letter to parents every few weeks so I can share with you some of what has been going on at school, while also taking a look ahead at what is to come over the following few weeks. There has never been a school year without ups and downs, and my goal is to share my thinking on the peaks and valleys while noting all the good work that students and faculty members produce on a routine basis. Above all, it is important that you know there is a direct route to getting in touch with me should you have questions or thoughts about the school. If we manage to do good work with all of you, we will be far better equipped to do good work with your daughters and sons.

As some of you will recall, work began on the site of what will eventually be our Center for the Arts in early June. An enormous amount has been accomplished since that time, and there is very little evidence left of the former auditorium and visual arts classroom

spaces. We have a camera on the work site around the clock, so you can take a look at the progress we are making at any point [HERE](#). While there is no question that this project is disruptive, we have identified alternative spaces on campus to run our arts program in 2017-2018, and we will be communicating about the project's state and impact on how we will move about as the school year gets closer. To watch the building rise out of the ground right before our eyes will be a sight to behold, and we are on track to have it "weather tight" by winter.

Beyond the Center for the Arts, we are also on schedule to complete our student center renovation and expansion by the end of this month. I have taken a number of walks through the space and have been amazed at how much bigger and brighter the whole footprint will be. This will be a dramatic upgrade on what was a tired and inefficient student center that was far less inviting than the new space will be. With a new and improved snack bar at the hub of the new and improved student center, we are confident students will be drawn to the space in ways that will only grow over time. We are on our way to the finest student center in New England! All told, a visit to campus between now and the opening of school would reveal a lot of work in motion.

As I noted on a few occasions through the second half of the 2016-2017 school year, we have been actively reviewing our academic day dress code for some time and for a variety of reasons. The following reasons have been primary in my mind:

- We should aspire to inculcate in our students the importance of dressing purposefully and in ways that are appropriate for different occasions.
- We have been interested in finding a way to a gender-neutral approach to academic dress that would better support the school's diversity and inclusivity efforts.
- With increasingly compelling arguments, advocates of a revised approach to academic dress point to the fact that dress codes at a wide range of places of work have evolved substantially over time. We can no longer make as compelling a case that a particular type of dress applies to particular vocations in life.
- We have been frustrated with the state of adherence to and engagement with our previous dress code in the midst of style and fashion shifts that have strained our ability to keep up.
- Our trial periods during this past school year, and community surveys that followed those trial periods, revealed a strong desire to continue to have an academic day dress code of some kind.

Our process also included a look at a number of dress codes at comparable schools. This revealed that there is greater range of acceptable dress at schools now than has ever been the case. Our revised approach to academic day dress code attempts to find some middle ground amongst the range of opinions on the subject, while simplifying what students and faculty members will be expected to wear to school. The particulars will be in the 2017-2018 Student Handbook and can be found [HERE](#). In general, we will approach academic day dress code in these ways:

**Formal Academic Dress** - On Mondays, Thursdays and for special events, we will expect an elevated level of dress to account for the fact that we are in Chapel on those days and will be having seated dinners together during those evenings. To dress in a way that is mindful and respectful of the fact that a community member or guest has prepared a Chapel talk for us, and notes a desire to emphasize that seated dinner together is more than an ordinary meal, are the primary drivers behind this approach.

**Academic Dress** - On Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, there is a list of types, styles, and conditions of clothing that will be explicitly prohibited. Beyond that, students

and faculty members will be permitted to dress as they wish.

**Spirit Saturdays** - On Saturday, students and faculty members may dress casually provided that at least one piece of exposed clothing is Brooks School gear or colors.

In all of these cases, a focal point will be dressing in a manner that has us in clothing that is neat, clean and in good repair. To engage fully in both the spirit and letter of this approach to academic day dress will be a priority as the year begins. If you have questions, please let me know.

There are two additional changes that we are excited to implement in the coming year:

First, we will be shifting school meeting from last period on Friday back to third period on Friday. This comes after holding school meeting at the end of the day for two years and feeling that we were not getting the community experience we hoped for. We will likely continue to hold school meeting every other week, and this will also allow for club meetings and extra help sessions with teachers during third period on Friday when we are not having school meeting.

Second, we are excited to finally have an opening in one of our girls' dormitories (Gardner) to house all third-form boarding girls in the same building. This group will be joined by seven sixth-form girls, who are equally excited to live with younger students and support their transition to Brooks. We have aspired to be in this place for some time, but have not had the right configuration of numbers of students to make it happen. We do this year and are pleased to be moving in this direction. Our hope will be to find a way to a similar situation with our boys' dormitories in the future.

Before closing, I do want to thank all of you who made gifts to the Brooks Fund during the final stretch of our fiscal year leading up to June 30. Our success in reaching our goal was due in considerable part to the support of our parents. I continue to be deeply grateful for that support.

Finally, I hope that some of you who are in the area might be able to join us for a reception on Long Island hosted by Joe and Susan Plumeri P'20 on Friday, August 11. If you are interested, please contact Director of Development Gage Dobbins at [gdobbins@brooksschool.org](mailto:gdobbins@brooksschool.org). We will hope to see you there!

I will write again as the beginning of school draws near in mid-August. Until then, please feel free to be in touch at any point. Enjoy the summer!

Best,

John R. Packard  
Head of School

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