



September 15, 2017

Dear Parents,

Ten days have elapsed since we began welcoming you and your children to campus, and we are now approaching the point at which some semblance of routine emerges. To this point in the year, the combination of special schedules and so much beginning all at once can be overwhelming. While this is particularly true for those who are new to this community, we all feel the same pressures and yearn to be in rhythm. My hope is that those who are new and might think that no one else is feeling what they are feeling come to see themselves as the majority. All of us have high hopes, plenty of nerves, and a lot that we are wondering about. It is also true that all of us have an opportunity to do our part to help one another move in the direction of the goals we have. I think we are well on our way in this regard.

To be clear, I do appreciate that it is much easier for me to offer these reflections about the start to the year than it is for your children to feel the kind of connection, sense of belonging, and shared experience that I am referencing. It takes time for all of us to get into the year. Despite this challenge, there have been lots of moments over the past 10 days that have felt great.

It is always exciting to start the school year together in the Ashburn Chapel, and we did that in splendid form (and dress!) on Wednesday of last week. After a few abbreviated class days, some new student orientation, and preseason athletics for some, we enjoyed the past weekend's tailgate party, dance, and field day activities. On Monday, our senior prefect, Jason Gold '18, delivered a wonderful talk in Chapel that recalled his own journey at Brooks, while encouraging all of us to dig into the school's life wherever and as often as we can. His message was excellent. Yesterday, we paused from our routine in order to do some form trips and activities. The change of pace was good for all of us. We appreciate that the ups and downs will continue to come, and hope that you will stay in touch with questions and concerns that will help us better support your children as the year takes shape. We hope to ensure that the transition we all have into the heart of 2017-2018 is as smooth as it can be.

We had our first School Meeting of the year today, and this comes after moving the time of the meeting from the end of the day to a mid-morning slot. As many know, the senior prefect runs School Meeting, and it has been held in the Auditorium for as long as I can remember. Thus, the demolition of that space and construction of our Center for the Arts has us thinking creatively about where we might hold School Meeting this year. We started in the Wilder Dining Hall this morning with a School Meeting snack to help things along! The plan is to see how that space works and perhaps try some different indoor

and outdoor venues over the course of the year. Stay tuned. The first School Meeting is not typical in many respects in that I need to cover a wide range of items that require our collective attention. I also have an opportunity to touch on the reasons that we come together in this way routinely, and emphasize that School Meeting works well when we are engaged and respectful of all who contribute to what makes it distinct, fun, and meaningful.

This morning, I spent time on the school's rules, our disciplinary process, and the range of consequences one should expect when violations occur. All of our rules exist to better allow us to execute on our mission and to live our values while we take exceptionally good care of your children. As a corollary to that notion, I spent time on the school's policies and expectations for interpersonal student relationships. Among other excerpts from our student handbook that I shared was the following: "The school does not condone or endorse sexually intimate activity among students, and advocates postponing sexual intimacy until students are past adolescence." At the same time, I made clear that Massachusetts law and the school expressly prohibit "students from engaging in nonconsensual sexual activity, considering it to be egregious misconduct and a major disciplinary violation." To be actively promoting appropriate, respectful and healthy relationships throughout the school at all times better positions us to achieve our mission and is core to who we are as a school.

A lighter part of today's opening School Meeting involved the beginning of what has come to be known as the Hello Campaign. This is an attempt to get all of us into a mindset of saying hello to one another as we move back and forth along Main Street with an overarching goal of coming to know one another's names. My practice for some time has been to award \$5 school store gift certificates to any student whose name I do not know when asked. I am going to expand to \$5 gift certificates to the snack bar this year, as it is clear in the early going that the new student center is drawing students to it all the time. A huge improvement! A big part of my push to learn the names of all who are new to the community and refresh my memory about those who are returning to Brooks will come when we get to the 7th Annual Nametag Party, held at our home one week from tonight for all new students, prefects, and leaders of all kinds. While returning students are free to ask whether I remember their names or not as of the beginning of school, it is not until the Nametag Party has come and gone that new students are able to join the fray. It is a lot of fun, and I hope it contributes to deepening a cultural norm that has us saying hello and working hard to know one another. If it makes some money for the school store and snack bar, as well, then all the better!

A final piece of this year's first School Meeting that I want to share with you is some information that I covered from an article that was forwarded to me from a parent, along with a few colleagues. The September 2017 edition of *The Atlantic* includes a wonderful and extensive piece titled "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?" by Jean M. Twenge. Of the many articles I have read over the years about "screen" time and adolescence, this is the most comprehensive, thoughtful, balanced, and data-driven. The piece refers to what Twenge identifies as iGen, or those who were born during or after 1995. For the school's purposes, a core conclusion of the data is alarming. Namely, that your children and our students are more likely to be happy if their screen time is less than average, and more likely to be unhappy if their screen time is more than average. This fact did not come as a surprise and has given me a bit more reason to push into this area going forward. So, we are going to try to engage in some conversation that points to what our community might gain with some expansion of "screen-free" spaces on campus. To find some short stretches and moments in our day when we emphasize face time with people and not with screens is the hope. The phones are here to stay. The challenge is keeping them in our pockets when we have the opportunity to be with one another.

On a different note, my wife, Kim, and I are looking forward to our first Saturday evening open house in our home tomorrow night, and we will have plenty of cookie dough and calzones on hand to ensure that no one goes hungry. We enjoy opening our home for some casual conversation, games, and time to get together at the end of a full week. The calzone rush at about 10 p.m. tomorrow night will be a sight to see.

The coming week will have us settling in even more and will include a Parents Committee meeting and our opening Brooks Together event one week from today. In the case of the former, we will meet in the Robert Lehman Art Center on Friday, September 22, at 4:30 p.m., and take some time to talk about the beginning of the year and some of what the school has its sights on as 2017-2018 takes hold. This will be followed by our Brooks Together event at 6 p.m. in the Frick Dining Hall. This launches our annual giving push with all parents, running through the fall, and we will share why this effort is so important to the school every year. We hope to see a lot of you at both events.

The next day, Saturday, September 23, we will host our admission fall visit day for prospective students and families beginning at 1 p.m. I know that a number of you will be helping with the program that afternoon, and I want to thank you in advance for making the time to do that. As many of you know, this event has been the first point of contact many students and families have had with Brooks in the past, and it is our hope that this year's version is our best yet. We are looking forward to an engaging afternoon.

The following couple of weeks will include some additional opportunities to meet prospective students and families with three admission receptions. We will be in Darien, Connecticut, on Wednesday, September 27, at 6:30 p.m., at the home of Michelle and Jeff Hudson '88. From there, we head to New York City in order to do the same thing on Thursday, September 28, at 6:30 p.m., at the home of Susan and Ace Crary P'16, P'20. Finally, on Tuesday, October 3, at 6:30 p.m., we will be closer to Brooks in Beverly, Massachusetts, at the home of Susan and Kevin Barry P'13, P'16, P'18 who are co-hosting this event with Kris Trustey P'13, P'16, P'19. Here, too, I would like to thank our hosts in advance. These evenings are always a lot of fun.

Before closing, I want to point out that the first exhibit of the year in The Robert Lehman Art Center, titled Look Twice, is already up and will have its official opening on Thursday, September 28, at 6:30 p.m. This mother/daughter show features the photography of June Jacobsen and her daughter, our photography teacher, Tabitha Sherrell. I hope that you will have a chance to join us for the opening, or to visit on your own at some other point over the next four weeks.

As always, please do let me know if I can be helpful in any way as the year settles in and we move more fully into all we are excited to achieve in 2017-2018. We are on our way to a great year.

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

