



March 9, 2018

Dear Parents,

With wintry weather complicating the beginning of spring vacation, I want to begin by thanking all of you for your flexibility earlier in the week. By now, I trust your children are all home, or into plans for this break that will allow them to rest and recharge ahead of our final 10-week push beginning at the end of the month. While we were spared heavy doses of cold weather and snow through February, winter does not tend to go quietly in North Andover, as Wednesday's storm reminded us. Let's hope that's it for the snow, and we have nice weather for the spring season that lies ahead.

As I anticipated in mid-February, we finished the late January to early March stretch in good form. While all students and teachers are working hard on tests, papers, and projects that need to be completed in time to be considered for third marking period grades and comments, we also move toward culminating moments of all kinds in our afternoon program. Certainly, the company that worked on and performed *Xanadu* so nicely in The Pike School's auditorium deserves our thanks and admiration for their efforts. The group did well with the challenging and unique circumstances we are facing in a year of construction. I was traveling on the evening of the Wilder Speaking Prize final round in the Ashburn Chapel, and missed those great talks given on the subject of integrity. Congratulations are in order for this year's winner, Nate Smith '18, and all those who participated in thinking about this critical school value. Our Model United Nations team spent a full weekend in February engaged in a range of simulations while wearing the shoes and circumstances of countries all over the world. We occasionally lament being in our "Brooks Bubble" through the year, and our students learned a lot and performed beautifully while stepping well beyond the confines of 1160 Great Pond Road. There is much more, of course, but I head into this break feeling we worked hard and achieved a lot in and out of the classroom over the past six weeks.

Our athletic program was equally busy through February and into the first weekend in March. Our teams at all levels worked hard, developed impressive camaraderie, and competed in ways that left me feeling that good sportsmanship mattered to us as much as anything. Aside from being talented on courts, rinks, and mats, our coaches and students display a sort of character and resilience that always leaves me feeling good to be associated with them. Our varsity girls squash team won a New England championship. Aly Abou Eleinen '18 mesmerized spectators and opponents alike as the #1 player on another successful varsity boys squash team. Our varsity girls hockey team qualified for the New England tournament and played their hearts out in a first-round game that could have gone either way. And our varsity boys basketball team won its third consecutive New England championship, and an astounding 66th consecutive game this past Sunday.

We have a great deal of athletic momentum to carry with us into the spring.

We have enjoyed a few different exhibits and opportunities in The Robert Lehman Art Center over the past month. Cynthia Packard's work was combined with a number of impressive student pieces earlier in the winter and made for a nice atmosphere in the space. #CONSTRUCTIONBROOKS invited members of the community to create on their own for a period of time ahead of the installation of Michael Kolster's work last week. RLAC Director Amy Graham will host an opening of this exhibit on Thursday, April 12, and you can learn more about the artist at www.michaelkolster.com. We hope you will have a chance to visit and enjoy the work.

As I have noted in my last two parent letters, we will be implementing a change in our current rule regarding vaping device and tobacco product possession and use, effective immediately. Unfortunately, we have had an additional disciplinary matter since I last wrote to all of you, involving a vaping device and drug violation that led to a student withdrawing from school. I spoke to the student body in school meeting two weeks ago about this rule change and believe we have made ourselves clear. In sum, the possession and/or use of a vaping device for any purpose, and the possession and/or use of any tobacco product, will constitute a major school rule violation. This would mean that students in violation of the rule should anticipate a discipline committee meeting and a school response that may well jeopardize their ability to continue to be at Brooks. It is our hope that this rule change will help discourage students from using, and will help support students who are non-users and have felt pressure to use.

I have also noted before that this is primarily a health issue. That feeling holds. Our Health & Wellness Center and Counseling Office are prepared to work in non-disciplinary ways with any student who needs help with vaping and tobacco use. I made this clear to the student body, as well, and we will continue to encourage students to help themselves, help one another, and make healthy decisions. We had a guest speaker from Minding Your Mind (www.mindingyourmind.org) with us on Thursday evening of last week, and his focus on taking good care of one's mental health is a component of making progress in this area. Our goal is to help students address stress and other factors that contribute to unhealthy decisions. We want to be helpful and avoid being in any disciplinary circumstances regarding vaping and tobacco use. If you have any questions on this front, please let me know.

Before turning to some of what lies ahead, I want to let you know that we have had a few academic dishonesty cases in the past few weeks that have led one student to withdraw from Brooks and another student to be suspended. With our Wilder Speaking Prize contest focusing on integrity, these major school rule violations are discouraging. Yet, it is our hope that lessons can be learned, and that the whole community appreciates the critical importance of submitting work that is one's own, and citing sources that have been consulted when writing papers and working on projects. We will remain on point in this regard moving forward.

Looking ahead, I want to share that both my name and the school's name will appear in this Sunday's *Boston Globe* as part of a full page advertisement that includes well over 150 independent schools in New England, and calls upon our elected officials to address gun violence on school campuses. I noted in Chapel on Monday how impressed and inspired I have been by students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, following the awful shooting that claimed 17 lives in February. I was proud of our students and the walkout they held on Tuesday of last week in our remembrance garden. They maintained silence for 17 minutes to honor the 17 victims. To do what we can to support them is important. We will be conducting a preparedness drill

with the North Andover Police Department and all of our students this spring. We will continue to work on being vigilant regarding campus and community safety, while we also lend our voice to efforts aimed at keeping school safety in focus.

On the other side of spring vacation, we are looking forward to our Community Day on Wednesday, March 28, and another opportunity to spend some time considering socioeconomic difference and poverty. The program for the day will involve a speaker, a film, some discussion groups, and chances to debrief together over lunch. The film we will watch is titled *Bending the Arc*, which is a documentary featuring the work of Paul Farmer and a number of others on addressing poverty and world health. Mr. Farmer has written broadly on the subject, and I suspect some of you have perhaps read his work and/or seen the film. The speaker, Linda Tirado, has appeared nationally and internationally and is the author of *Hand to Mouth: Living in Bootstrap America*. She is personable, engaging, and will help us see socioeconomic difference and poverty through some new lenses. Above all, we hope the day is enlightening and inspiring as we think about ways in which we can make a difference going forward.

Finally, I want to offer my thanks for the help you will provide once our admission decisions are posted on March 10. There is little that makes a more profound difference in a student's or family's decision about secondary school than the experience students and families are having in the moment. I thank you for the time so many of you make to share your perspective on the school with others. To add some terrific new students and families to our school is the goal. Your work and support helps tremendously. Furthermore, I want to add that we are all looking forward to the community appreciation luncheon you will be hosting for us on Monday, March 26. You are kind and generous to share your time and talent with us that day. It is a wonderful way to begin the spring.

I shared with the school on Monday that I have felt encouraged and proud and joyful at different points through the winter. I know that will continue in the spring. We are fortunate to work with you and your children and will be eager to finish the year well when we return at the end of the month. Until then, take good care and enjoy this spring vacation!

Best,

John R. Packard
Head of School

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