

COMMONWEALTH SCHOOL

151 COMMONWEALTH AVENUE
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02116
(617) 266-7525

WILLIAM D. WHARTON
HEADMASTER

23 August 2000

Dear parents,

I am writing to tell you how much I look forward to working with your children and you in the coming year. My collaboration with Judith Keenan through the spring allowed business at Commonwealth to carry on without interruption: in the last six weeks I have overseen a working transition, busy with some last-minute hiring, assembly scheduling, and individual conversations with Commonwealth faculty and staff about the school and its direction. It will be important in the coming year to keep open time for discussion and reflection about some of the broader questions the school faces.

From conversations this summer with teachers, job candidates, and prospective consultants it has become clear to me how fortunate we are to have a school that understands itself as clearly as Commonwealth does—a tight-knit school that offers distinctive programs in academic subjects and the arts to students from many backgrounds, and that seasons its intellectual enterprise with plenty of real-world experience in the city and beyond. Ours is a small school with big ambitions, a combination that poses interesting challenges as we endeavor to attract, often in competition with much larger institutions, the students and teachers who make it work, and to offer, with limited resources and significant time constraints, a wide variety of courses and activities. Finding ways to ensure that the school can fulfill its mission over the long term is a critical task in the coming years. Last November the Board began long-range planning discussions and a process of addressing these questions fully is underway. You will hear more about this work in the coming year.

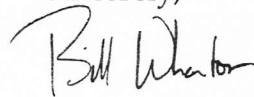
In my conversations I have also been struck by the deep commitment that teachers and students share for the school and what it stands for. With personal enthusiasm and professional skill teachers here take genuine delight in your children's successes and give their all to help them overcome difficulties. While we all have slightly different takes on just what is most important in what we do (I can tell you from experience that Latin teachers tend to be convinced of the primacy of place their discipline deserves in the academic hierarchy), the willingness of all—teachers, students, and parents—to talk frankly and honestly enables us to work together with your children's best interests at heart. This clarity of vision and depth of commitment reassure me as I assume my new post.

I hope to see all parents of new students on the evening of Wednesday, September 13. At this evening for new parents we will serve a light dinner, have a brief welcome and orientation session, and then send everyone off to visit abbreviated classes and to meet teachers.

On Tuesday, October 3 we will hold our first meeting of the Parents' Association. Since I have met most of you, an evening to "meet the new headmaster" sounds strangely superfluous, but I would like an opportunity to talk at slightly greater length about the school and the challenges it faces, and, more importantly, to hear your questions and comments. You will hear more about this evening in the next month.

At Commonwealth the advisor has always been the primary point of contact between home and school, but you are also welcome to call Farhad Riahi, Director of Studies, with questions or concerns about your child's academics, or Kate Bluestein, Director of Student Life, about social or personal matters. And finally, my door is always open if you wish to get in touch with me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Wharton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "B".

COMMONWEALTH SCHOOL

151 COMMONWEALTH AVENUE
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02116
(617) 266-7525

WILLIAM D. WHARTON
HEADMASTER

August 23, 2000

Dear returning students,

The beginning of the year approaches, and I trust that you are making the most of the last few weeks to finish summer reading, review your Spanish, French, or Latin, and make sure you're all caught up on sleep.

I'm now moved into the big office and am settling into the new job. I've been talking with your teachers over the summer about, among other things, their thoughts on the kind of school Commonwealth is, what we must preserve, and what we should think about changing. I'm also interested in hearing your thoughts on these matters, and hope that the coming year will afford chances for some of us to sit down and talk one-on-one. But I also very much hope that many of you will be able to attend the student and student-faculty meetings for returning students, at which we will be able to discuss specific concerns you have, as well as some more general questions.

The meetings will take place on Tuesday, September 5. At 10:00 a.m. you can meet among yourselves in room 2C. You may find it helpful to choose a facilitator or facilitators to lead your discussion and the afternoon conversation with the faculty. In the morning you can discuss what you want to say and put together an agenda for the afternoon meeting, which will begin at 1:30 in the library. If you want to eat in school bring a box lunch; we'll supply milk.

You probably have some specific concerns, but I'd like to put forth a few questions for you to consider. I found these in a letter that Charles Merrill sent to students in August of 1966 in preparation for that year's student-faculty discussion. They're good questions, so I decided to pose them again, with a few adaptations.

1. Do you feel challenged and stimulated by the courses and requirements at Commonwealth? How important are the choices available to you?
2. Is sufficient stimulus given to imagination, initiative, independence in your academic work?
3. How could efficiency of study and teaching be improved? Is sufficient extra help available?
4. Do you consider Commonwealth a morally straightforward community, in the way students and teachers act toward the school and each other? How could this be improved?
5. What can we do to live comfortably, or at least civilly, with 141 students in the building. (We've made some adjustments, but welcome ideas.)
6. Do you have ideas about arts? sports? extra-curricular activities? Hancock? What can we do to make what we offer better? How can we encourage all students to participate fully in these areas?
7. Are there good channels of communication between students and faculty? What could be done to improve opportunities for leadership and responsibility?
8. What do you consider the major challenge facing Commonwealth this year?

I don't expect a list of answers, but hope the questions will provoke thoughtful discussion.

You'll find some changes in the building when you return. The Dartmouth Lobby will be rearranged, with the copier over by room 1A and new benches in the nook it used to occupy. New benches will also grace the nook near room 3E. We have 140 new cubbies—most on the third floor, a few replacing the closet between the couches in the Dartmouth Lobby—and what used to be the dance studio is now room 5A (dancers will practice at the Boston Center for Adult Education's studio on Arlington street). We've put in new doors to the first-floor bio/chem office and what used

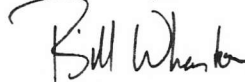
to be Ms. DelTredici's office on the third floor, which Mr. Racioppi will now inhabit.

In addition to thirty-five new students we will have six new teachers joining us in September. Make a point in the first weeks of school of saying hello and introducing yourselves to those you don't know. Lunch is a great time to get to know the new people here.

Speaking of lunch, I will close by requesting that you try to eat lunch at school. If you go out, keep it to once a week. There are a number of good reasons, social and economic, for doing so that I would be happy to discuss. Whether you go out for lunch or eat at school, be sure to show up for announcements. We have to have ways to get messages out to everyone, and it's much easier and more pleasant to do so face to face. In my public school we had in each classroom squawk boxes out of which announcements and the pledge of allegiance (led by a specially chosen student) would blare first thing each morning. Show up for announcements and I won't be tempted to recreate my childhood experience.

I look forward to seeing you soon. If you need or want to get in touch before then, please call me at school.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bill Whelan". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".