

---

**Headmaster's Opening Letter to Students and Parents**

---

Greetings, Commonwealth students and parents,

I hope that you all have had a pleasant and interesting summer and are feeling rested and ready for the coming year. Please take the time to read through the whole letter—in addition to some thoughts that I hope will spark some conversation in the coming months, there is some new information as well as some reminders that you all should be aware of.

**Summer Thoughts and Activities**

In June, while attending a conference at Stanford University, I had lunch with two Commonwealth alums at Google's Mountain View headquarters, and later hosted a gathering in San Francisco for another fifteen or so alums, a group that included graduates working at Apple, Google, and some tech and aerospace startups. I was struck that a good number of them spoke about the value of the writing and reading skills they developed at Commonwealth. They were grateful for the depth of the science, math, and, in many cases, computer science training they received, but all noted that the ability to formulate clear written arguments, which they learned in humanities classes, had proven vitally important to their success. (Apparently there are many very good programmers who are hampered by an inability to produce the kind of clear program notes that development teams need.) Two of the alums work at Google (separately) in the area of speech recognition, and the problems they work on draw on their ability to parse language, with all of its shades and ambiguities, in ways that would make their English teachers proud. At a time of rising emphasis on science, technology, and math education, it's good to hear from those inside the industry about the importance of writing and reading.

These conversations got me thinking more about the shape of our curriculum. There are other reasons, beyond the reasons I heard from our alums, that we require four years of English and art, three of history, and three of foreign language. By exposing math and science lovers to Shakespeare, Spanish, and Roman history, while requiring those who would rather read history or literature to grapple with trigonometry and thermodynamics, we are asking each of you to stretch yourselves and explore the world through different lenses and disciplines. STEM classes offer rigorous tools for understanding the physical world and (in math and computer science) structures of argument and thought. History and language explore the sweep and variety of human culture. Literature engages the imagination to enter into other minds and lives, while the arts invite you to exercise creative expression and craft. These disciplines demand different types of rigor and thought: for example, we want you to understand that causal explanations ("Why did this happen?") differ significantly between literature, history, and chemistry. Each discipline demands a different kind of response. These years offer you an opportunity to become well rounded, which is shorthand for developing the full range of your abilities and sensibilities, giving you an array of tools to bring to bear on the wide range of challenges and opportunities that life will present to you. And we often see that some students who view themselves simply as, say, math or history people, may discover that their ideas about themselves were too narrow. If you can leave high school with more and deeper interests than you had when you entered, your time will have been well spent.

So much for thoughts. The school has not been too quiet this summer. We hosted a two-week summer program run by the *Concord Review*, and much of the building was transformed into performance space for a six-week run of a play, *Greater Good*, about a private elementary school, produced by Company One Theatre in collaboration with the American Repertory Theater. For six weeks in July and August we also inaugurated our own summer enrichment program for middle school students, Dive In Commonwealth.

In addition, a Student Life Task Force has met through the summer to explore ways to enhance community life, finding ways to help students cope more effectively with—and find respite from—the pressures of work. We have also continued work we started last year with Margolis Healy, a Vermont company that consults with schools and universities on safety, to ensure that our facilities and practices safeguard our community. (I write this letter days after the shootings in El Paso and Dayton, hoping against hope that our elected leaders will take substantive action to control the weapons and shift the rhetoric that have served as accelerants to the violence and growing hate that we have seen in the last decade.) In the coming year we will undertake further training, drills, and other measures to secure the safety of everyone at Commonwealth.

**Departures and Arrivals**

We saw a couple of staff departures over the summer. Many of you have, I believe, already heard that Bouchra Danielkebir, our Dean of Diversity and Inclusion, decided in June to move on from Commonwealth to a new position with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We are sorry to say goodbye, but remain deeply grateful for the good work she did overseeing our diversity program, guiding community service, teaching City of Boston, and, most notably, leading, with Sasha (Watson) Eskelund, the effort to create Dive In Commonwealth. That the program launched this summer with five promising students and a talented staff is testament to Ms. Danielkebir's hard work and dedication to helping Commonwealth better fulfill its mission to serve students from all backgrounds.

In August, our Assistant Director of Admissions, Lindsay Ewing, left to take a position in the admissions office at Babson College in Wellesley. Ms. Ewing has been interested in working in admissions at the college level, and this opportunity proved an appealing one. Over the last three years she has proven a reliable, thoughtful member of Commonwealth's admissions team, as well as a wise and steady advisor to students. We are grateful for all she has given the school. We wish Ms. Ewing and Ms. Danielkebir all the best.

To cover for Ms. Danielkebir's departure, Monica Schilder will step back into her former role as adviser to the student Diversity Club. Sasha Eskelund will assume full leadership of Dive In Commonwealth. Rui Shu will oversee the community service program, and Will Holub-Moorman will again teach City of Boston. We are currently running a search for a new Assistant Director of Admissions.

In the wake of Wendy Mechaber's departure last fall, we have distributed her responsibilities as follows: Josh Eagle will handle all accommodations for students with learning needs. Please reach out to him if you need to discuss neuropsychological testing, adjustments to program, or the like. Don Conolly is taking over coordination of tutoring support for any students whose tutoring is set up through the school. Please reach out to Mr. Conolly with questions about tutoring schedules and arrangements with our in-house tutor or with an outside tutor with whom we regularly work. Emma Johnson and Josh Eagle will work together to secure special accommodations from the College Board on standardized tests. Please reach out to either Ms. Johnson or Dr. Eagle to discuss applications for accommodations. (Since this process can take time, it is important to start it well ahead of time.) We are welcoming a group of new faculty and staff this fall (in alphabetical order by last name):

**Morgan Chalue**, joined us this month as our new Development Coordinator. Mr. Chalue earned a Bachelor of Music, magna cum laude, in Vocal Performance from Boston University and has held a number of music, office, and fundraising positions at Boston University, B.U.'s Tanglewood Institute, Stratford Street Church, and Mass Opera. He is working toward completion of a Masters in Arts Administration and a Graduate Certificate in Fundraising Management from B.U.

**Brittany Costin** joined our Business Office as our new Staff Accountant last May. [By the time you read this she may already be out on parental leave through mid-October.] Ms. Costin earned a B.S. in Business Administration from Salem State University and has worked at a number of for-profit companies as an Accounts Payable Specialist and Accounting Associate, and she served for one year as Business Manager at the Saugus YMCA.

**Matthew Singer** joins us as our new teacher of computer science and math. Mr. Singer comes to us from Northeastern University, where he worked as Course Coordinator for the Fundamentals of Computer Science I & II classes, managing TAs and tutors, lecturing, and coordinating regular and advanced sections. He earned his B.S./M.S., magna cum laude, in a combined Computer Science and Mathematics major at Northeastern. Mr. Singer also has industry experience, most recently as a software engineer at HubSpot. He comes with deep familiarity with our curriculum's approach to CS and with very strong recommendations from Northeastern.

**Emma Sundberg** is our new biology teacher. Ms. Sundberg has a Ph.D. in Cell Biology from Yale, where she was a McDougal Graduate Teaching Fellow and a teaching fellow for Cell Biology last year. Emma received her B.A. in Biological Science and French Studies from Smith College in 2014, where she also worked as a T.A. and Residential Intern at the Smith Summer Science and Engineering Program.

**Student Faculty Discussion**

We will move the faculty discussion with returning students that used to happen just before the opening of the school year to the second week of school, during assembly period on Thursday, September 12. (New students will meet separately that period for follow up on orientation.) I am hoping that the move will generate more participation and interest among students and that we'll be able to use part of the time for a discussion of topics of interest to you students, and of some that are of interest to us, including a preliminary outline of some of the Student Life Task Force's recommendations. I would suggest that the newly elected Student Reps to the Board, returning Peer Advocates, and perhaps a reconstituted Roller Skating Committee (i.e., any students interested in helping to shape school life) might use some of the first week's lunch periods to meet and come up with a list of topics and points you'd be interested in raising with faculty and staff. As always, I would counsel that the topics be matters of general student concern, as opposed to a list of an individual's specific issues. The latter are best handled in one-on-one conversations with one's advisor or with me. My door is always open.

**School Forms, Handbook, and Other Business**

You all received an email from Rebecca Jackman on August 5 confirming course registration for the coming year and containing information from Emma Johnson about book ordering. If you have any questions or difficulties determining what books you need or in purchasing them, please get in touch with Ms. Johnson. We are grateful to the Parents' Association for putting together a textbook exchange on August 27.

Let me turn to a few perennial reminders. First, each student's required forms are due on **August 22**. You received an email earlier this month with links to SchoolDocs, where the forms are available. Students cannot attend school without the required forms. Any student whose required forms are not in by the first day of school, **September 4**, will be asked not to return until the office has them in hand. Again, a student for whom we do not have completed forms will not be permitted back after the first day of school. Please get in touch with [Stephanie Poynter](#) if you have questions about forms or need help with them.

Note that among those forms is an acknowledgement that you, parents and students, have read the Parent-Student Handbook. If you have not already done so, please download a copy and read it carefully. I would especially call your attention to the following sections:

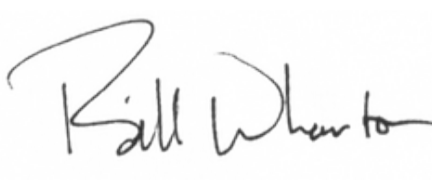
- **The paragraph on absences on page 16.** Please notify us of any day that a child will not be in school. We need to hear from the parent, not the student, about illness or absences. Also, please do not make travel plans that include school days—the latter can be a particular problem at the beginning and end of vacations. With exams, Hancock weekends, and Project Week taking up more than three weeks of the school year, we expect full participation on the days classes meet.
- **The section on communication on pages 41-43.**
- **The appendices on harassment, hazing, bullying, and other serious misconduct.** Cruelty among students has been a rare occurrence at Commonwealth. We want to make it perfectly clear that it has no place in the school.
- **Appendix H**, outlines the Allergen Awareness and Response policies, which we revised three years ago. Any families for whom this is an issue should read this carefully and follow up with us regarding particulars regarding your children so that we can keep them safe.

Parents are invited to Back-to-School Night on **Thursday, September 12, at 6:00 p.m.** We will serve a light supper, have a brief announcement and orientation session, and then send parents off to visit abbreviated classes to meet teachers and learn about the courses their children are taking. We hope you can make it. RSVP to [Cary Renshaw](#), Associate Director of Development, as soon as possible.

At Commonwealth, the advisor has always been the primary point of contact between home and school. Parents should get to know their children's advisors, but you are also welcome to reach out to [Rebecca Jackman](#), Assistant Head, or [me](#). Email is the most reliable way to reach us, even if only to set up a phone conversation.

I look forward to welcoming all of you to the new school year in person in a couple of weeks.

Yours,



Bill Wharton  
Headmaster

**Opening Dates:**

**August 27, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.** Commonwealth Book Exchange

**September 3:** Orientation Day for New Students

**September 4:** Classes begin. Opening Assembly at 8:30 a.m.

**September 5:** Assembly - Group discussions of summer reading

**September 12:** Assembly - Student faculty discussions and new student orientation follow-up

**September 12:** Back-to-School Night for Parents

