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LEGISLATOR UPDATE AND 2026 LEGISLATIVE AND BUDGETARY PRIORITIES

We are pleased to welcome you to the annual Brookline School Committee Meeting with Legislators. We continue to appreciate your leadership and support on behalf of the Public Schools of Brookline (PSB). We particularly appreciate your strong advocacy that doubled Chapter 70 aid in FY26, and gratefully acknowledge that your efforts resulted in an additional \$211,000 to the school district.

Following the arrival of our new Superintendent, Bella Wong, on July 1, 2025, we are optimistic about the status and direction of our district. Superintendent Wong has established a strong leadership team, including new deputies in the Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL) and Office of Student Services (OSS). Together, this team is defining a clear vision for meeting the needs of all PSB students, and sharing that vision with the School Committee and the public.

We are pleased to report:

- A major district priority this year is the roll-out of a new, evidence-based K-8 literacy curriculum (Fishtank), including a robust professional development plan.
- Brookline High School (BHS) underwent an intensive review by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and was re-accredited. BHS was commended for many strengths, including “effective instructional leadership at the school and department level,” “ample opportunities for students to take charge of their own learning,” and “high-quality teaching professionals who demonstrate strong content knowledge, use diverse instructional strategies, receive ongoing professional development, and build positive relationships with students.”
- The Pierce School Project remains on schedule and on budget. The ceremonial “Topping Off” ceremony was held in December, and drilling for the geothermal wells underneath Pierce Park has begun.
- With evolving guidance from the state, BHS and district leadership are working on new High School Competency Determination standards following the statewide vote to eliminate the MCAS as a graduation requirement.
- Members of the School Committee and PSB senior administration have been working with our Town partners on the Expenditures & Revenue Study Committee (ERSC) to define the context and parameters of a possible operating override request in May, 2026.

Brookline School Committee 2026 Legislative and Budgetary Priorities

The Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) published a report, in October 2025, entitled, "A Perfect Storm: Cities and Towns Face Historic Fiscal Pressures." The report stated: "Cities and towns across Massachusetts provide many of our most essential public services, including everything from clean water and safe streets to high-quality schools and dependable emergency services. These are the quality-of-life services that impact the lives of residents every day. Rising costs and sluggish state aid are putting enormous pressure on local budgets across Massachusetts. A prohibition against local sales taxes and income taxes, combined with a 2.5 percent cap on property tax increases, prevent municipalities from raising adequate revenue on their own to respond to community needs."

Brookline, like all communities in the state, faces these challenging fiscal pressures. We therefore ask our state (and national) legislators to significantly increase financial support to Brookline (and to all communities) for our five major priorities:

- 1. Chapter 70:** We advocate for increased funding for the Foundation Budget and Chapter 70, and specifically for Senate Bill No. 345, which would eliminate the inflation cap on Chapter 70 funding. We ask that this funding be determined early in budget deliberations so that we, and school districts across the Commonwealth, will know what we can expect from the new foundation budget.
- 2. Full funding for Special Education:** The provision of special education services continues to put pressure on our annual budget. We support Senate Bill No. 430/House Bill No. 691 to study the long-term fiscal health and sustainability of special education funding. We advocate for full funding of Special Education costs, an increase in the Circuit Breaker reimbursement to 90%, and insurance participation for medically necessary treatment in school (for example, 1-on-1 nurses). We ask that the approved costs threshold be lowered to \$37,120.
- 3. METCO:** We are in support of full, stable funding for METCO. We advocate for increased flexibility for district-level decision-making to allocate the METCO grant (e.g., so funds can be applied to our general operating budget) and increased funding for the *METCO Supplemental Special Education Grant* to fully cover the costs of providing special education services to METCO students.
- 4. Safe technology use and distraction-free education:** We support legislative efforts to require public schools in the Commonwealth to develop and implement policies governing the use of personal electronic devices. Specifically, we are in support of Senate Bill No. 2561 which would prohibit electronic devices "bell-to-bell".
- 5. Funding for high-quality pre-kindergarten.**