Welcome to the 2018-2019 school year at Brent Elementary!

This year, we are thrilled to welcome a projected 456 students, which represents an overall enrollment growth of 8 percent. It is a thrilling prospect to have the opportunity to serve so many young people, and we are not waiting for the year to begin.

Throughout the 2018-2019 school year, we will serve our students through the set of operating principles below, which are inspired by our strategic plan, rooted in an analysis of our potential, and designed to guide our growth as a school community:

- We will seek understanding about individual students in order to advance their learning.
- We will employ instructional structures and strategies that emphasize depth in learning.
- We will enhance operational efficiency such that our physical space and systems are an enabling force for teaching and learning.
- We will apply intentional and consistent social-emotional learning to all aspects of the school day.
- We will provide opportunities for collective and transparent communication and planning.

These operating principles will also act as our school goals, naming our destination while allowing flexible and response routes for getting there. We have thought and worked carefully during the summer to make progress in the direction of these goals, and one purpose of this letter is to communicate decisions we have made and the steps we anticipate as we launch the school year.

Understanding the Needs of Individual Students: Focus Teachers
During budget negotiations this past spring, we were able to reconfigure our staffing model to support the placement of one additional certified teacher at each grade level. This is a change from our previous model in which three special education teachers and one reading intervention teacher stretched across the entire school population. We have named this position the “focus teacher” in alignment with the expectation that the work will involve focusing on the needs of individuals and groups of students at the grade level, while partnering with the classroom teachers to deliver both support and curricular instruction based on the trends observed.

Depth in Learning: Changes in Specials
A position that has been added for the 2018-2019 school year is the Atelierista, a role common in Reggio Emilia programs, but new to Brent. The Atelierista will work with early childhood and kindergarten classes to provide integrated arts, music, and science aligned to the provocations being undertaken in the classrooms. Students in these grades will go to the atelier space at least once per day, three days per week (with PE and Library on the other two days) as their specials class, and the Atelierista will work closely with the classroom teachers to deepen the work that most interests each class of students.

Also this year, our art, music, and science teachers have innovated a substantial change to their scheduling for first through fifth grade by adopting a modular schedule. This means that students in a class will attend one special subject three or four times per week for one trimester of the year, then switch. Whereas in the past, classes have gone to each special once per week for the entire school year, a modular schedule allows for students to engage in the study of a specials discipline with greater...
consistency. Because physical education is a little different, students will continue to attend PE once per week. There are many reasons the teachers predict that this model will deepen learning in each special subject, and we are eager to study the approach.

Physical Space: Growth and Re-Allocation of Rooms
Our enrollment growth necessitates operational shifts in terms of space and the way we manage it. We will open two demountable classrooms (trailers) to house our science and art classrooms and will use the former space they shared for our Atelier. This means that every grade level class and every special subject will have their own space.
In addition, first through fifth grades will have access to their own flexible, small-group teaching room, used by classroom teachers and the focus teacher.
Though we have lost a portion of the blacktop, the front of the school will be fully enclosed with a 48” temporary fence (to be replaced by a permanent fence pending a DDOT permit) to allow play space to extend into the grassy area on the North Carolina Avenue side of the school.

Staffing Updates
Because of the growth in the student support model mentioned above, some staffing transitions have also taken place. We are excited to welcome several new team members to Brent, and have worked hard to ensure that every grade level team at Brent has a balance of returning staff, knowledgeable about structures and students as they have been, and new staff, who will bring fresh eyes and perspectives to our work.
Every year brings at least a small number of departures, as faculty members retire, relocate, or seek new opportunities. This year, we wish a fond farewell to Byron Anderson, Lucy Clark, Sarah Isaacson, Jen Marchese, Ashli Wilson, Sara Yokum, and Mary Young. We also have staff members taking on new roles and positions in the building. They are: Emily Kadash, Kelly Laskowski, Andrea Meneghello, Chloe Patterson, Julia Sadowsky, and Sharon Santos. Finally, we welcome new faculty members: Megan Dunn, Donna Girardi-Reed, Hyon Herbert, Rebekah Hoisl, Abigail Maslin, Melissa Lee, and an entirely new custodial team consisting of Jason Lawrence, Victor Berry, and Michael Minor. Please join us in cheering on our new community members as they become a part of the Brent family!

Social-Emotional Learning: Playworks Partnership
We are excited to be partnering with the non-profit organization Playworks as we learn to negotiate our new recess terrain. Playworks partners with districts all over the nation, especially in urban areas, to help schools consider how recess can be a positive experience for all students, how social learning can be enhanced during play time, and how good use can be made of limited space and equipment. This program will evolve across the year, starting with basics such as clear expectations and the joy of new games and equipment and extending to student leadership of the space. We see great promise in the partnership, and are grateful to have the opportunity to work with them.

Collective Communication: Parent Engagement and Visioning Structures
Brent is so fortunate to have an engaged and proactive parent community, and as the school grows, the structures through which that engagement is captured are particularly important. Our PTA, led this year by co-presidents Ben Champa and Christina Muedeking, holds monthly general meetings and facilitates the work of various parent committees focused on fundraising, volunteering, and equity of voice. Both the meetings and the committee work are levers for all parents; we encourage everyone to get involved. The Local School Advisory Team (LSAT), which is an elected body of parents and faculty
members, advises school leadership on budgetary and curricular issues, and often seeks parent input on questions related to the school’s growth and vision. Parent Chairs will be elected in September from current membership. The Diversity Working Group (DWG) is a body that aims to advance Brent Elementary’s commitment to respecting and valuing diversity by engaging in work centered around issues related to equity in education. It is an open group, and all community members are welcome at any time. The DWG is being chaired by Danielle Drissel. Finally, and of particular importance in the 2018-2019 school year, the School Improvement Team (SIT), addresses topics related to the physical plant and its expansion. The SIT is led by school administration, but welcomes participation from parents, particularly those who have experience and knowledge related to building in the city.

On a personal note, I get to share the wonderful news that my wife and I are expecting our first child this fall. We are elated to be embarking on the journey of becoming parents, and feel so fortunate to have the support of the Brent community while we begin this new chapter in our lives. This means that I will be taking parental leave during this school year and, while the dates for this leave are not yet certain, I have the utmost confidence in the leadership team that will run daily operations in my absence. Assistant Principal Sara Ewbank, Manager of Strategy and Logistics Denise Diggs, and our highly competent faculty and staff will maintain business as usual and will address any needs and concerns that arise while I am away. More details will come with the arrival!

I am excited for the year ahead and cannot wait for our hallways to fill with the productive noise and energy of our school community. I can hardly describe the joy and gratitude I feel beginning my second year as the principal in this building, and as the school year gets underway, I am eager to get to know each one of you better as we learn and grow together. I look forward to seeing you at our Open House on Friday, August 17th (3:00-4:00), and during the first days of school, when we embark on this adventure.

Sincerely,

Norah Lycknell
Principal