

Dear Brent Families,

We are still grieving that circumstances prevent us from seeing students in person. We are in a state of collective stress, even as we understand that families face unique challenges from work demands to childcare, from coping with loss to wondering how we can find ways for our children to socialize and connect.

But when we step back to imagine and plan, we can also see the enormous opportunities to address these challenges, and our scope of institutional growth, with a sense of hope and innovation.

Even in this very different year, we have a strong foundation. We are Brent Bears and approach the future with the values of Bravery, Empathy, Activism, and Responsibility. Our Operating Principles, posted on our website ([brentelementary.org](http://brentelementary.org)), shape our aspirations. And the lessons we learned from almost four months of virtual learning in the spring join these values and operating principles to shape our goals for the 2020-2021 school year:

- ❖ To foster connection and engagement with proactive and responsive social-emotional supports
- ❖ To build student independence, acknowledging developmental levels, within and beyond the virtual learning environment
- ❖ To encourage and monitor student attendance through presence, points of engagement, and student work.
- ❖ To conduct authentic and ongoing assessments of student learning to inform feedback and responsive instruction
- ❖ To design learning goals and next steps that target individual student's needs across content areas
- ❖ To prioritize equity in all spaces, from an examination of bias to the allocation of resources.

Our values, Operating Principles and goals live in the context of a larger District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) system that provides the structures, expectations and guidance for our work.

### **Our Community**

This year we will welcome about 450 students, over 300 families, as well as 57 faculty members, five of whom are new to Brent. We know that community will feel different in a virtual space, but we also see that space as an opportunity to be even more purposeful about access and relationships. We are fortunate that our Parent Leadership Groups – the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), the Diversity Working Group (DWG), the Local School Advisory Team (LSAT), and the School Improvement Team (SIT) – will intentionally contribute to how our community evolves. With their support, we will hold New Family Orientations and monthly Community meetings, host grade-level and class meet ups, launch with virtual home visits, amplify the role of room parents, establish a school directory, and structure systems to respond to specific social-emotional and resource needs.

Class lists have also been formed with community in mind and are enclosed in the summer mailing packet and posted on Brent's website ([brentelementary.org](http://brentelementary.org)). They will hold for Term 1 or the duration of virtual learning. After examining several models, we decided to preserve student cohorts from the 2019-2020 school year, with the addition of (grouped) new students. PK3 because it is a new cohort, and K and 5 because there is a shift in the number of classes. The early release of these student class lists opens the possibility of making connections before the start of the school year; here, we ask that you are intentional about building on existing relationships *and* seeking new ones, something that we are ready to support as we focus on students who lack the connections they deserve.

## **Becoming an Antiracist School and Community**

Brent strives to be an antiracist school and community. In *How to Be an Antiracist*, Ibram X Kendi gives us a working definition of what it means to be antiracist: "To be antiracist is to think nothing is behaviorally wrong or right -- inferior or superior -- with any of the racial groups. Whenever the antiracist sees individuals behaving positively or negatively, the antiracist sees exactly that: individuals behaving positively or negatively, not representatives of whole races. To be antiracist is to deracialize behavior, to remove the tattooed stereotype from every racialized body. Behavior is something humans do, not races do." Being antiracist means fighting against racism and the individual, interpersonal, institutional and structural forms that it takes.

Though these definitions provide a common starting point, it is for our community to further shape them and the ensuing actions. In the spring, 30 participants volunteered for an Antiracist Listening Sessions and recently, representatives from our faculty, administration and Parent Leadership Groups held a meeting to discuss and plan from the themes that emerged; we will also hold another round of Antiracist Listening Sessions in the fall. Our faculty has launched a *Becoming an Antiracist School and Community Working Group* that will collect data, carefully research, and determine actions around structures like curriculum, professional development, communication, instructional bias, and cultural competency. We ask that parents, especially White parents, have conversations about race at home, just as we will in our classrooms, and the DWG is committed to sharing resources as a guide. We believe that this is an essential community conversation and pledge to maintain a dialogue.

Part of that dialogue is providing the information and mechanisms you need to participate. The TuesNews will provide weekly updates, so that our community understands our areas of focus and can provide feedback. Our monthly Community Meetings will focus on Antiracism. And our everyday exchanges will be opportunities to lift up and process what it means to be antiracist.

The time is now. Becoming an Antiracist School and Community is also an ongoing process towards a way of being, not a series of quick actions to be set aside and forgotten. Inspired by a society-level conversation and, in some ways, rebuilding school to match the current environment, we embrace this opportunity to become better and better serve.

## **The First Weeks of School**

School will feel different than it did in the Spring. Though we learned a lot from the experience, Spring was a more temporary state; our plans for Term 1 acknowledge a longer lasting one. Attendance will be taken each day. The daily schedules are denser with content and live instruction (whole class, half class, small groups, and individual conferences), are consistent within grade bands and levels (ECE, K-2, 3-5), and share school school-wide blocks of time like morning meeting, lunch, and closing meetings.

Grade-level schedules and schedule keys are enclosed and represent the full list of instructional blocks. Half class and first cycle small group assignments will be emailed to families on August 24<sup>th</sup>, and printed versions will be available as part of the supply distribution process.

As is the case at the start of every school year, our students will need support and scaffolding (incremental steps) to reach the levels of stamina and independence that their learning schedule demands. In many cases, we will build up to full blocks of time the schedule lists, with scaffolded goals set and shared by each grade level to both celebrate incremental student accomplishments and to provide a platform for support and intervention when those goals are not yet reached.

In the first week of school, we will operate on an alternate schedule to make space for one-on-one Virtual Home Visits. Morning meetings, small groups and closing meetings will still occur but other content blocks will be introduced in week two, along with many of the instructional routines critical to the virtual space.

THE FIRST SIX WEEKS OF SCHOOL					
Week One: Connections	Week Two: Routines of Learning	Week Three: Scaffolding Up	Week Four: Scaffolding Up	Week Five; Scaffolding Up	Week Six: Community Culminating Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wear Your Brent Green</li> <li>- Ramping Up Virtual Home Visits</li> <li>- Morning and Closing Meetings</li> <li>- Small Groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Week One + Introduce content blocks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Week Two + Scaffold Toward Independence</li> <li>- Back to School Night</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Week Three + Scaffold Toward Independence</li> <li>- Health and Fitness Day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Week Four + Scaffold Toward Independence</li> <li>- Math Night</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Week Five + Class Name</li> <li>- Schoolwide Rules</li> <li>- Planning Banner Parade</li> <li>- Looking ahead to Family Conferences</li> </ul>

### Learning at Home

The partnership between school and home has never had more meaning. Caretakers are now facilitators, enabling student access to this learning and sharing information with us about how that learning is going. To help you prepare for this learning facilitator role, we will publish a Family Handbook on August 28<sup>th</sup> along with the link to our Asynchronous Virtual Open house. Every three weeks and beginning with Back to School Night, we will extend and problem-solve these recommendations with a Learning Facilitator Series. DCPS is also offering Parent Universities, the schedule for which can be found [here \(https://www.eventbrite.com/c/dc-public-schools-parent-university-universidad-para-padres-cwwxfgp--HICuolZ2J8au/\)](https://www.eventbrite.com/c/dc-public-schools-parent-university-universidad-para-padres-cwwxfgp--HICuolZ2J8au/).

You may be wondering what you can do to prepare now. First, read [this article \(https://www.dropbox.com/s/0wm5ujvobq843wo/How%20to%20Proactively%20Prepare%20for%20Distance%20Learning%20-%20The%20New%20York%20Times.pdf?dl=0\)](https://www.dropbox.com/s/0wm5ujvobq843wo/How%20to%20Proactively%20Prepare%20for%20Distance%20Learning%20-%20The%20New%20York%20Times.pdf?dl=0). It thoughtfully describes the facilitator role, one that involves students in the planning process. Second, establish a dedicated learning space for students, whether a dining room table or desk, to distinguish between the home and school space. And finally, mark your calendars for our supply and technology distribution days (See the enclosed Term 1 Calendar). For shared purpose, consistency and equity, we will provide grade-level learning supplies and the technology requested by individual families.

### Communication

We expect that virtual school will require frequent communication. We will rely on many of the existing structures like TuesNews and grade-level emails, even as we augment it with an in-process website redesign and a more significant social media presence. Teachers are still the most important point of contact, particularly for student-specific issues, but we are also developing other points of access, like our technology response and social-emotional support teams, to share the weight and promote a timely response. Please read the regular communications and reach out whenever you have a question not answered there – if you are not sure where to go, email [brentelementary@k12.dc.gov](mailto:brentelementary@k12.dc.gov) or call our main number at 202-698-3363 and we will direct you to the right place. We will anticipate needs and be proactive in our communication and. When we do not yet know, we will tell you how and by when we will find out.

# UPCOMING COMMUNICATIONS

Tuesday, August 18 <sup>th</sup>	Friday, August 21 <sup>st</sup>	Monday, August 24 <sup>th</sup>	Tuesday, August 25 <sup>th</sup>	Friday, August 28 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday, August 30 <sup>th</sup>
<u>TuesNews</u>	Teacher Assignments Emailed	Teacher Welcome Email to Parents: Virtual Home Visit Sign Up Half Class and First Cycle Small Group Assignments	<u>TuesNews</u>	Teacher Email: Grade-Level Parent Handbook Link to the Asynchronous Virtual Open House	Community Email: First Day Reminders

We are headed into the most unusual school year of our lives. It requires us to set clear goals and monitor them, to take excellent risks and learn from them, and to operate with a balance of direction and agility. Most of all, this year requires us to rely on one another, to be patient and compassionate, and to remember that while we cannot change the prescribed version of school, we can always change the student experience and the community experience for the better. Together.

Sincerely,

Norah Lycknell  
Principal