

Engaged Citizen Corner

Brookline students – they care

League of Women Voters of Brookline

Brookline students of all ages are actively participating in their schools and the Brookline community. They are engaged, having success, and are learning skills that will help them navigate the world and become future leaders.

According to Matthew Cooney, Executive Director of the Brookline Teen Center, one attribute teens have in abundance is that they truly care and want to do good in the world. This motivation is key to development of teen leaders. Where adults might see barriers to developing an idea, they see opportunity. . .

Following are a few examples exemplifying teen leadership from Brookline High School (BHS) and the Brookline Teen Center (BTC).

BHS Student Government: BHS has a Constitution that parallels much of the governance structure of the US Constitution, Executive-Legislative-Judicial branches, and a detailed process for students, faculty and administration to interact and make decisions together.

According to Max Siegel, a leader in BHS's student government, a number of their initiatives illustrate creative use of leadership and process to achieve their goals: working together on school rules, current and proposed policy changes; working to pass an anti-vaping (anti-juul) health policy; working towards a homework-free weekend policy to reduce student stress; updated headphone policy – and the list goes on.

BHS Clubs: Feedback from some faculty advisors illustrates student interests and initiatives, inside and outside the school.

- Students Against Institutionalized Racism have helped to alter and/or provide curriculum, and have helped to carry on tough conversations about race. They created a middle school mentorship program to talk about racism and social justice, teaching students that their voice matters from a young age.

- Multiracial/Multicultural Affinity Community works to create an inclusive space for students, teachers (and their families) who identify as biracial or multiracial, or live in a multicultural home. Students in this group are providing space for open and honest conversation, helping to sponsor BHS' Asking for Courage Day, and taking leadership roles in action groups throughout BHS.
- The Brookline Literacy Partnership is a student-led nonprofit group working to prevent a lack of literacy from acting as a roadblock to self-improvement. They are currently partnered with the Mather Elementary School in Dorchester and the High Street Veterans Brookline Public Housing. Five BLP members were recently recognized at the Brookline Youth Awards.
- The Environmental Action Club spearheaded waste separation in the cafeteria starting in June 2017. Students and staff separate their food and soiled paper, recyclable containers and trash. Tons of compostable waste has been diverted.

Brookline Teen Center: The BTC is a non-profit drop-in, out-of school time facility offering an array of programs, activities and events. The BTC strives to transform lives by connecting members with the experiences, resources and supports they need to succeed both in and out of school.

The BTC has a long-time focus on being a “teen-driven” program, with a Teen Board of Directors, Teen Music Team, Teen Events Council and teen employees. Teens are involved in marketing, media and programming decisions and use the BTC as a place to launch their own ideas for projects, events and programs. Among them is the Tutor Mentor program, started by high school students who tutor and mentor middle school students in Brookline.

Brookline students are finding their voice, following their passions, and learning the skills of civic engagement – for now and the future.

Prepared and submitted by a member of the League of Women Voters of Brookline. The League is a nonpartisan organization that encourages informed and active participation in government and that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. All articles can be found at <https://brookline.wickedlocal.com/search?text=Citizen%20Engagement%20Corner&start=1>.