

Communications and Community Relations Sub-Committee Report
Thursday, October 13, 2022
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA

Called for the purpose of discussing school councils and the school council handbook.

Members Present: Member Weinstein, Co-Chair; Member Fantini, Co-Chair; Member Wilson

Also Present: Manuel Fernandez Chief Equity Officer; Sujata Wycoff, Director of Communications; Raymond Porch, Family, and Community Engagement Director.

Co-Chair Weinstein started the meeting at 6:00 p.m. **Co-Chair Weinstein** outlined the meeting and shared the goals of the meeting:

- Discuss school councils
- Discuss school council handbooks
- Provide an opportunity for community members to join in the discussions, ask questions and share ideas on these topics with the administration, and the Sub-Committee members.

After brief introductions from all of the meeting attendees, **Co-Chair Weinstein** emphasized the importance of School Councils to the District. He acknowledged the diligent work of the Working Group and highlighted the intention of the School Committee to continue to support these efforts. He then passed the floor over to Mr. Fernandez for a [presentation](#) and an introduction of the new Family and Community Engagement Director – Raymond Porch. Mr. Fernandez then presented an overview of the school council and school handbooks.

Following the presentation, **Co-Chair Weinstein** opened the meeting up for questions and discussions:

- Piotr Mitros asked for clarification regarding the current school handbooks and site-decision-making based on DESE guidelines as he expressed concern that according to DESE guidelines as there is no mention of an advisory role of School Councils, but rather recognized them as site-based decision-making entities. Mr. Mitros shared that the DESE handbook states that SIPs should be reviewed and approved by school committees. He is concerned that Cambridge School Councils have been operating counter to state and federal regulations. He shared that state and federal regulations were included in an original version of the Working Group's draft and inquired about the process of their removal by CPS administrators.
 - Mr. Fernandez responded that he could not speak to the specifics of the language that was omitted or amended as he did not draft the handbooks. He offered to review the DESE document and to work with the Superintendent for clarification on the review process. **Chair Weinstein** highlighted the importance of the School Committee reviewing school improvement plans to gain a sense of how the improvement plans are supporting the goals and particular needs of the schools.
- Emie Michaud Weinstock provided clarification on the draft school handbooks. The drafts were caregiver-led along with Robin Harris where input on what was happening at schools and best

practices to improve any issues that the schools were factored into creating the draft handbooks. She expressed the importance of including anti-racism, diversity, and equity in the drafts. She also provided suggestions on how the administration can improve school councils.

- Christian Henry asked if there were any specific language that the Sub-Committee and administration wishes to share regarding discussions regarding school councils.
 - Mr. Fernandez responded that he is interested to hear the input and feedback from parents regarding school councils. **Co-Chair Fantini** provided background on the Education Reform Act of 1993 and the reasoning for the implementation of School Improvement Plans. Before the passing of the Education Reform Act, school operations (including the hiring of teachers were on behalf of the Committee), once the Education Reform Act was passed, it allowed Superintendents and Principals the authority to manage school operations with the implementation of School Councils.

Co-Chair Weinstein suggested that the Sub-Committee considered the school handbooks to be a working document and asked for further suggestions on the review and the revision process. Mr. Fernandez responded that informed discussions with all stakeholders are important in school council and school handbook decisions.

- Piotr Mitros asked for clarification on the grounds for the revisions of the school handbooks to be published without the School Committee's review. **Co-Chair Weinstein** shared that the Sub-Committee will work with the administration to determine the most feasible next steps.
- Emie Michaud Weinstock also shared that there is a School Council self-assessment and highlighted the importance of utilizing them to meet goals and continuous improvement,

A discussion followed on the next steps. It was agreed that the next steps regarding the policy should be to:

- Review the School Improvement Plan Process to be consistent with DESE regulations
- Further discussions on how the review and the revision process takes place to include all stakeholders
- Connect with the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) for assistance on processes to determine that the school handbooks comply with state and federal laws.

Member Wilson asked for further clarification on who approves the school handbooks and the best ways to involve the School Committee in more discussions and review of the handbooks. She also inquired about continuing to discuss and get feedback on the school handbooks and school, councils at all of the scheduled Communications and Community Relations Sub-Committee this year,

The next Communications and Community Relations Sub-Committee meeting will be on December 15, 2022.

Co-Chair Weinstein thanked everyone for attending the meeting and for their contributions. **Co-Chair Weinstein** adjourned the meeting at 7:32 p.m.