

Virtual Curriculum and Achievement Subcommittee Report
Wednesday, October 11, 2023
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA

Called for the purpose of an update and a discussion of advanced learning supports.

Subcommittee Members Present: Member Weinstein (Chair); Member Rojas; Member Wilson

Also Present: Dr. Lendozia Edwards, Chief of Academics and Schools; Heather Francis, Director of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support; Dr. Nicole Gittens, Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Schools; Dr. Karyn Grace, Interim Assistant Superintendent of the Office of Student Services; Molly Singh, District Instructional Lead Teacher, Advanced Learning JK-12

The meeting started at 6:02 p.m. **Chair Weinstein** welcomed the group and began the meeting by reading the call of the meeting and discussing the meeting's objectives. He noted that the meeting would be available through CART and that a CART provider would be providing real-time translation.

Chair Weinstein shared the agreements of the meeting and its structure. The meeting attendees introduced themselves and **Chair Weinstein** noted that participants would have 3 minutes to provide comments with the following guidelines:

- Speak and listen from the heart (respect)
- Step up/step back (watch airtime)
- Progressive Stacking approach to conversation
- Expect and accept non-closure (work in progress)
- Bike rack (list of things that are important but should be addressed another time)
- Public comment participants three-minute limit to present, after which time they will be muted by the Confidential Secretary.
- If people want to speak again, they will need the chair to call on them and be unmuted.
- The aim is to foster greater back-and-forth, which is valuable for subcommittee meetings

Chair Weinstein opened the floor to public comment.

Emily Pollock, a CPSD caregiver, gave a historical background including the inclusion of an intensive studies/magnet program, and the 2012 Innovation Agenda which included the promise of rigorous heterogeneous classrooms and advanced math opportunities. Ms. Pollock was unsure if these goals were met. Currently, she highlighted that caregivers are fighting to bring back Algebra I in eighth grade and that the needs of advanced students are not being met. She noted parents' disappointment and believes this has contributed to the 20% decline in middle school enrollment. She hopes that additional staff will be added to each school for advanced learning needs and that the option of bringing back a magnet school can be discussed.

Erin Logan, a CPSD caregiver, shared her personal background as an advanced student from the Midwest. Moving her family to Cambridge, she had high hopes for advanced learning opportunities and attended an advanced learning meeting of like-minded caregivers. She was disappointed to learn about the lack of resources. She is looking to the School Committee to set a policy for advanced learning. She noted Molly Singh's important leadership in this area but believes that the work needs more than one dedicated staff person. Dr. Gittens noted her experience as a former ISP student in the district and her experience as a current administrator. She offered to share her personal experiences later in the conversation.

Dr. Edwards introduced Molly Singh and Heather Francis, noting that Ms. Francis had been with the district for only one week.

Ms. Francis and Ms. Singh shared the following [presentation](#).

Following the presentation, **Chair Weinstein** opened the floor for questions.

Ms. Logan highlighted that children should not have to wait while adults organize. She noted that she has been hearing about Tier 1 instruction for the past two years and wonders if this is the best that CPSD can do for its children. She asked about the resources that are available today for students seeking advanced support other than parents advocating directly to teachers. Dr. Edwards appreciated the historical perspective and underscored the goal of providing advanced support during WIN blocks. Dr. Gittens added that the district is poised to respond because of the scheduling guidelines and required WIN blocks. She noted that advocacy is an important part of the process.

Chair Weinstein asked how advanced learning students are identified. Dr. Edwards shared that Ms. Singh is working with coaches and interventionists to provide appropriate supports.

Ms. Pollock highlighted that relying on parent advocacy will be highly inequitable and favor high-income students. She noted that Black and Brown students who are viewed as having discipline issues are oftentimes unidentified advanced learners who are bored. She advocated for universal screeners. She appreciated the work of the district, but believes that the MTSS framework appears to put the burden heavily on teachers. She believes that CPSD must come up with ways to support teachers. **Chair Weinstein** asked about professional development opportunities that support teachers. Student Member Anjaria concurred with Ms. Pollock that teachers are being asked to do more in the classroom. Dr. Edwards underscored the research noting that teachers have the most impact on student achievement. She agreed that teachers are doing a lot of work, but highlighted that coaches and interventionists are at every school.

Related to the presentation and the percentage of students needing Tier 2 & 3 supports, **Chair Weinstein** would be interested in seeing more detailed data regarding the number of students who have been identified as needing supports.

Member Rojas asked to circle back to Dr. Gittens to allow her to share her personal experiences as a CPSD student and educator. Dr. Gittens highlighted her experiences as a student in the ISP program which included opportunities such as undertaking research papers or science experiments. Student participants were a diverse group. She noted that this remains standard practice at CPSD. Looking back to her student experiences, she believes that all students could have benefitted from these opportunities. She highlighted that the group should be mindful of programs that separate students. **Chair Weinstein** noted the Level Up Program where every child is challenged and supported.

Member Rojas underscored that the chart included in the presentation highlighted that the progress of Hispanic students was in a similar range of Black/African children. He shared that OSS undertakes some of the most challenging work in the district. He asked what the “easy wins” might be in the next 1-2 years. Dr. Gittens asked Ms. Singh to respond. She noted her impactful work with coaches and interventionists and shared that she would be visiting two schools the following day. She is enthusiastic about professional development opportunities, as well as having the time and space to focus more on the Excellence Gap and to assist students early on. Long term, she is enthusiastic about having the new MTSS Director onboard and believes the Universal Design instruction will be helpful to teachers. Dr. Gittens concurred that professional learning opportunities are important to both new and veteran teachers. Dr. Grace highlighted the integrated work of the OSS and its oversight of four

divisions. She conducted a success gap analysis which showed a lack of systems. She underscored that the MTSS Design Team is a DESE recommendation.

Member Rojas noted that the curriculum was paired down during the pandemic. He confirmed the district's policy for middle schoolers to have access to Algebra, recognizing that the pandemic impacted this offering. He inquired about the availability of having camp for middle schoolers so they could advance in Algebra. Dr. Edwards said that she will get back to Member Rojas.

Student Member Anjaria asked when the initiatives would be rolled out. Ms. Francis shared that they applied to DESE for a professional learning opportunity to build out the continuum of supports and they are awaiting a decision from DESE. The other initiatives continue to be developed and rolled out. Dr. Grace noted that the guidebook is 80% complete and is in the final round of feedback from stakeholders. Most structures are in place, but there is variability among schools. She looks forward to having a common frame in the near future.

Ms. Pollock shared that parents were told that 8th-grade Algebra would be available later this month. She is concerned about Tier 2 & 3 needs in advanced learning. It will become increasingly difficult for classroom teachers to meet their needs. She suggested that i-Ready data could help identify these needs. She is concerned about their mental health needs. She would like to see more support from the district for teachers and advanced learners. Dr. Edwards highlighted the use of WIN blocks and noted that the guidebook will include information for advanced learners. She noted that a Roundtable discussion focused on math was forthcoming. Ms. Pollack noted that WIN blocks were sometimes used for orchestra in the middle school.

Member Wilson thanked the presenters and highlighted the importance of professional development. She echoed the group's earlier sentiment that CPSD has great educators, but noted that there are always areas for improvement. She highlighted the urgency of families and young scholars. Ms. Singh underscored that she is responding to teacher inquiries. In reviewing the data, she noted that approximately 15 students in grades 3-8 have scored above 2 grade levels in math. She has flagged these students. **Member Wilson** asked about the School Committee's next steps regarding the policy of skipping a grade and how the Committee can explore this deeply. **Chair Weinstein** agreed that not having a policy regarding skipping a grade was problematic. **Member Rojas** heard from a middle school parent whose child finished Calculus on his own and was interested in taking the AP exam. He was told that he could not take the test. **Member Rojas** inquired about the policy. Dr. Edwards noted that she would follow-up and believes that it might be a College Board requirement. Student Member Anjaria shared that he knew of high school classmates who took an AP exam without being in the AP class.

Chair Weinstein asked about the organizational chart and where Ms. Singh fits and how it relates to advanced learning. Dr. Edwards shared that Ms. Singh is currently focused on math due to the increased interest in math, but that Ms. Singh supports both ELA and math.

Chair Weinstein noted action items regarding the policy on advancing grade levels and looking at caseloads and staffing to ensure alignment with needs. **Member Rojas** reminded the group that subcommittees are not decision-making entities.

Chair Weinstein concluded the meeting at 7:31 p.m.