

January 28, 2025

**SCHOOL COUNCILS AD HOC SUBCOMMITTEE – VIRTUAL MEETING**

**School Councils Ad Hoc Subcommittee Report  
Tuesday, January 28, 2025 at 6:30 p.m.  
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio  
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA**

Called for the purpose of a review of the School Council Handbook and Policy and an overview of the School Council Ad Hoc Subcommittee purpose and plan.

**Subcommittee Members Present:** David Weinstein (Chair); Vice Chair, Caroline Hunter

**Other Members Present:** Member Richard Harding; Member Elizabeth Hudson; Member Rachel Weinstein

**Others Present:** Jaime Frost, Principal of the Tobin Montessori School; David Murphy, Interim Superintendent; Dr. Michelle Madera, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary and Early Education; Dr. Ray Porch, Director of Family and Community Engagement; Jackie Piques, Director of Communications; Ivy Washington, Chief Financial Officer

**Chair Weinstein** started the meeting at 6:30 p.m. by confirming the meeting is live.

**Chair Weinstein** outlined the meeting's agenda and goals for the discussion which included:

- Discussion of school improvement plans, protocols and guidelines
- Sharing recommendations, and considerations from Cambridge Public School District administration
- Opportunity for public comment and responses to questions when possible, and to determine next steps

**Chair Weinstein** highlighted the agreements of the meeting (below):

- Speak and listen from the heart (respect)
- Step up/step back (watch air time)
- Expect and accept non-closure (work in progress)
- Bike rack (list of things that are important but should be addressed another time)
- Public comment would be limited to 3 minutes to allow for a broader discussion.

**Chair Weinstein** opened the floor for public comments. The public did not have any public comments at said time.

**Chair Weinstein** turned the meeting over to Interim Superintendent David Murphy who presented the following slides which can be found on this [website](#).

During the presentation, Interim Superintendent Murphy shared the following highlights:

- The district's goal of strengthening school improvement plans (SIPs) and aligning them with data-driven decision-making.
- The shift to a two-year SIP cycle with clear timelines and structured milestones.
- Proposed policy updates such as staggered school council terms, officer term limits, and aligning SIPs with elections and budgeting.
- Revisions to the SIP template to improve accessibility and usability.
- Budget considerations, including clearer funding structures, comparisons with other districts, and increased transparency.

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- Next steps: consulting with school leaders, refining SIP timelines, and strengthening professional development.

Interim Superintendent Murphy paused for discussion. Dr. Madera explained the purpose of school improvement plans, emphasizing that they are data-driven and student-centered. She also described the process of developing SIPs including data analysis and goal setting. Dr. Madera provided examples of how they can be used for numerous initiatives like clubs and socioemotional learning. She highlighted the need for realistic goals and the importance of collaboration between school leaders and school councils. Principal Frost shared her experience with SIPs at the Tobin School and emphasized their importance in driving decision-making. She provided examples of how SIPs have been used to address specific needs such as literacy and school culture. Principal Frost also emphasized the need for continuous improvement and the importance of involving the entire school community in the process.

**Chair Weinstein** emphasized the need for aligning school improvement plans with district goals, improving communication, and engaging stakeholders. He highlighted the challenges in managing timelines, funding disparities, and community participation. **Chair Weinstein** advocates for better feedback loops, school committee involvement, and potential training for school councils to enhance understanding and decision-making. **Vice Chair Hunter** valued understanding the school improvement process over just aligning timelines. They stress the importance of data-driven decisions, community involvement, and training for school councils to enhance participation. **Member Hudson** urged clearer communication of school improvement plans and budgets, as many parents struggle to access or understand them. She suggested simplifying materials, actively distributing information, and setting realistic, data-driven goals instead of overly ambitious targets. CFO Ivy Washington explained federal funding has minimal impact on SIP budgets, as it makes up only about 2.5% of next year's total budget, including grants and school meal reimbursements. She adds that the vast majority of district funding comes from local sources, making any potential federal funding changes easier to manage.

Chair Weinstein opened the floor for public comment. Given the time constraints, each speaker was allotted one minute. The following caregivers, Anne Coburn, Missy Page, Carroll Magill and Anna B. Shin shared the sentiments:

- The allocation of school improvement funds and the need for more effective use of sources
- The distinction between general fund initiatives and school improvement initiatives
- Concerns about schools leaving unused SIP funds each year and the reason, whether the issue stems from not using a two-year budget cycle
- If allocating less money would make spending more manageable, or if unused funds should be reabsorbed into the CPSD budget
- The reason certain recurring costs are funded through SIPs instead of the general budget
- Concern that some SIP items feel too generic and should be covered as standard operating costs rather than school improvement initiatives
- Supporting school councils in encouraging the use of SIP funds by the end of the fiscal year to avoid underspending
- The law refers to the overall school budget, not a separate SIP budget, raising questions about why funds are categorized this way.

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- Fair elections for school councils are crucial because elected members have a strong interest and represent their peers effectively.

**Chair Weinstein** gave space for committee members and administrators to reflect on public comments.

Interim Superintendent Murphy shared the following key points:

- The differences in spent and unspent funds aren't because of a lack of priority or too much money going to school improvement but due to the increase in resources after COVID, which led to some budgets not being fully used
- The need for clarification about resource allocation—resources are limited but not as much as in other districts
- The importance to separate basic school needs from more strategic budget aspects to ensure clear communication
- The need for clarification about how resources are shared, separating basic school needs from strategic plans that need school council input
- The importance of giving school leaders some flexibility while setting clear expectations for planning and new ideas

**Vice Chair Hunter and Chair Weinstein** expressed appreciation to the group. **Chair Weinstein** concluded the meeting at 8 p.m.