

March 6, 2025

CURRICULUM AND ACHIEVEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE

Virtual Curriculum and Achievement Subcommittee Report
Thursday, March 6, 2025 at 5:30 p.m.
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA

Called for the purpose to review an update on CPSD work on advanced learning and consider next steps in support of meeting student needs.

Subcommittee Members Present: Member Weinstein (Co-Chair), Member Harding (Co-Chair), Member Hudson

Also Present: Dr. Heather Francis, Executive Director of Academics; Meghan Papalardo, New Lead Teacher for Advanced Learning; Erin Logan, Member of CALA (Cambridge Advanced Learning Association); Emily Pollock, Member of CALA (Cambridge Advanced Learning Association)

Co-Chair Weinstein started the meeting at 5:30 p.m. by confirming the meeting is live and welcomed the group.

Co-Chair Weinstein shared the agreements of the meeting's structure which included:

- Speak and listen from the heart (respect)
- Step up/step back (watch airtime)
- 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 Executive Secretary

Co-Chair Weinstein opened the meeting emphasizing the need for a formal and equitable approach to supporting advanced learners across the district.

Co-Chair Weinstein turned the meeting over to Dr. Heather Francis, who presented slides on advanced learning which can be found on this [website](#). She introduced herself and expressed a strong personal commitment to advancing this work, highlighting that she is a first-generation college student who benefitted from public education and access to advanced learning opportunities in her own academic journey.

Dr. Francis introduced Meghan Papalardo as the new lead teacher for advanced learning, sharing that she was formerly a math coach at the Putnam Ave Upper School. Meghan Papalardo expressed enthusiasm about joining the team and highlighted her involvement in the Bridge to Algebra program and middle school math acceleration initiatives. Ms. Papalardo noted her excitement to support effective district-wide initiatives and foster collaboration across schools.

During the presentation, Dr. Francis shared the following highlights:

- i-Ready data shows a lot of students are already performing above grade level in both literacy and math.
- Black and Brown students are underrepresented in advanced learning as often. The district is trying out new acceleration guidelines to help address this.
- MTSS is being used not just for students who need support, but also for those who need more challenge.

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- Schools are using WIN/Flex blocks to give kids enrichment during the school day.
- The need for more flexible curriculum options to meet students where they are.
- Educators need to shift their mindset to better support students who are ahead.
- The proposed acceleration process includes referral options.
- Decisions will be made using multiple data points to figure out if a student needs advanced instruction or maybe even grade-level acceleration.

Dr. Francis then turns the meeting over to Emily Pollock and Erin Logan, co-leaders of CALA (Cambridge Advanced Learning Association), to discuss the work the district has been doing with CALA. Ms. Pollock and Ms. Logan shared concerns about inequity in current practices that rely on parental advocacy. They advocated for earlier intervention (starting in kindergarten), increased curricular support, and district-wide policies to ensure all students' needs are met. They noted that unsupported advanced learners often experience emotional and academic disengagement.

Co-Chair Weinstein proposed drafting a policy before summer 2025 to standardize identification and support for advanced learners. **Member Harding** questioned how advanced learners are identified across schools and emphasized consistent access to services. **Member Hudson** highlighted resource gaps, suggesting one lead teacher is insufficient to support so many students. She also asked about integration of these efforts into teacher evaluations and accountability structures. Dr. Francis responded that a policy could support stronger accountability and clarity. She acknowledged mindset shifts, staff development, and curriculum flexibility are necessary to ensure success.

Co-Chair Weinstein opened the floor for public comment. Given the time constraints, each speaker was allotted three minutes. The following caregivers, Keely Danielson, Sam Ribnick and Nina Mitchell shared the sentiments:

- The accelerated math curriculum has led to increased student frustration and disengagement, even among previously high-performing students.
- Support of the earlier enrichment opportunities.
- The current momentum presents a significant opportunity to benefit students as early as next school year.
- Suggestion that Cambridge adopt a more transparent and accessible process for identifying advanced learners.
- It can be difficult to get support for advancing students, especially in middle school.
- The need for a centralized system to streamline and open up the process.

Co-Chair Weinstein thanked all participants for their thoughtful contributions and engagement. He concluded the meeting at 7 p.m.