



# CAMBRIDGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

135 BERKSHIRE STREET, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02141

March 21, 2023

TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE:

Approval of Revisions to the School Council Handbook

**Recommendation:** That the School Committee approve the attached School Council Handbook.

**Description:** This School Council Handbook was developed by a diverse working group through the Family Engagement Office. This reiteration of the School Council Handbook contains the following revisions that have been made since the first iteration of the handbook was published in Spring 2022. The majority of the revisions in the attached version of the School Council Handbook were reviewed and/or discussed with the Communications and Community Relations Sub-Committee. This version of the handbook also contains several additional clarifications as well as some formatting corrections that were noticed during the final proofing of the document for submission with this recommendation. The changes are as detailed below and are highlighted in yellow in the attached document:

**Page 1 Introduction:**

“representative advisory groups that collaborate in advising the principal...enhance the achievement of all students.”

**Page 1 Introduction – Goals of Handbook:**

“...voice in advising principal...”

“state laws and regulations”

**Page 2 School Committee Responsibilities:**

“annual SIP to be approved by the Superintendent.”

Divide the following two items into two separate bullets:

“Review the student's Rights and Responsibilities handbook regularly to ensure the school discipline policies”

“Assess student discipline data”

Page 2 School Council General Functions:

“Leadership assess school alignment with district, goals, mission and core values.”

Page 2 Racial Equity:

“Becoming an anti-racist school will be a goal developed in collaboration and supported by every school council. School Councils will collaborate with school leadership on developing needs assessment addressed in the school improvement plan.”

Page 2 Reviewing the School Budget:

"The SIP budget, is the vehicle through which the School Councils ....so that they may advise...."

Page 3 School Improvement Plan:

“SIPs allow for school communities to identify priority... connecting departments around specific needs, and providing time and space”

Page 6 Nomination and Election Procedures

“appropriate organization”

Page 7 Minutes:

“Meeting minutes must include:

- the date, time and place of the meeting;
- the members present or absent;
- the decisions made and actions taken, including a record of all votes;
- a summary of the discussions on each subject;
- a list of all documents and exhibits used at the meeting; and
- the name of any member who participated in the meeting remotely.

They will be recorded by the Recording Secretary and should have all technical language and educational jargon, abbreviations, etc. defined in plain language.”

Page 7 Subcommittee Meetings

“Subcommittee meetings are subject to the open meeting law and must be noticed in the same manner as all School Council meetings. Minutes must be taken and presented to the full school council during

a public meeting to ensure transparency and given the general public time for public comment. “

#### Page 8 Open Meeting Law

“File the notice for each meeting with the City Clerk with enough time to permit posting of the notice of each meeting 48 hours in advance, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays. Also in terms of making sure sufficient time is taken into account in filing the notices with the City Clerk for timely posting, it should also be noted that the City Clerk’s office closes at noon on Fridays. Meeting notices must be posted in a legible, easily understandable format; contain the date, time, and place of the meeting; and list all topics that the co-chairs reasonably anticipate will be discussed at the meeting. The list of topics must be sufficiently specific to reasonably inform the public of the issues to be discussed at the meeting. The principal, as co-chair, shall be responsible for filing the notice for each meeting with the City Clerk in accordance with the systems that have been put in place to ensure compliance with Open Meeting Law requirements.”

“Keep minutes indicating the date, time and place of the meeting; the members present or absent; the decisions made and actions taken, including a record of all votes; a summary of the discussions on each subject; a list of all documents and exhibits used at the meeting; and the name of any member who participated in the meeting remotely. “

#### Page 8 Some Open Meeting Law notes specific to Cambridge Public Schools

“Meetings will be posted a week in advance on the school website, and emailed out the school community.”

#### Page 8 Supporting the School Improvement Plan (SIP)

*“Note: These priorities are based on the SIP Template. As of January 2023 a new SIP template is being developed and these priorities will be updated accordingly.”*

#### Page 10 Appendix: See School Council Assessment Process

Page 10 deleted “Legal Support” section as duplicative of “Legal Accountability” section

#### Page 13 Actively Anti-Racist and Culturally Responsive

“family liaisons” and “administration”

The changes in the section of the handbook discussing the Open Meeting Law have been made to ensure accuracy and alignment with current state law, regulations and guidance in this area.

It should be noted that the current law related to extending certain state emergency accommodations, which, among other things, extends the provisions allowing public bodies to continue

holding meetings remotely without a quorum of the public body physically present at a meeting location, and to provide "adequate, alternative" access to remote meetings until March 31, 2023 has not yet been further extended. If this is not further extended, the language in this handbook related to conducting virtual meetings will need to be adjusted to ensure compliance with the Open Meeting Law as in effect as of April 1, 2023.

This is a first reading of the School Council Handbook.

Supporting Data:        Highlighted School Council Handbook

Respectfully submitted,



Victoria L. Greer, PhD  
Superintendent of Schools



**CAMBRIDGE**  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

# School Council Handbook



## INTRODUCTION

**What are School councils and why were they established?** School councils are **representative advisory groups that collaborate in advising the principal in planning for and implementing a school's improvement. School councils were established to assist principals in planning for and implementing goals and practices that enhance the achievement of all students.** They are the main instruments for practicing the site-based decision making called for in the 1993 Education Reform Act.

School Councils advise the principal on decisions that affect the entire school community and are tools for the advancement of all students in Cambridge Public School. School Councils are a high leverage place for parents/guardians/caregivers to make a positive and meaningful impact on the achievement and wellbeing of their children, as well as all children in the community. Advocacy skills that parents/guardians/caregivers and students learn through involvement in the School Council can prepare them for civic engagement and public office at any level, and it is the intention of the district to galvanize parent and student advocacy through School Councils.

*The goals of this Handbook are:*

- To make School Council policies and practices uniform across Cambridge Public School District, while also leaving space for each unique school community to adopt practices that serve the best;
- To solidify School Councils as a diverse, and equitable space that reflects the diversity of the students (racial, disability, LGBTQ+, multi-lingual, income) with representatives from parents/guardians/caregivers, from secondary-level students, teachers, and community members to have **voice in advising the principal** on site-based decision making. Every effort should be made to ensure that marginalized groups are represented;
- To ensure that each School Council functions as it should under **state law and regulations.**

This document is the first attempt in a multiyear effort to strengthen, reform, empower, and support teacher and family engagement through School Councils in the district. This first version of the School Council Handbook was written from March - June of 2021 by a diverse working group of parents/guardians/caregivers, students, family liaisons, teachers, and administrators, in partnership with the newly formed Family Engagement Office. A full list of working group members is available in Appendix 1. The Family Engagement Office believes that partnering with community stakeholders, especially parents/guardians/caregivers, is central to the work of the district. Creating this School Council Handbook was one of the first priorities in revisiting policies of family engagement. The process modeled the collaboration that all district leadership bodies can engage the diverse

community and hear from parents/guardians/caregivers in authentic, meaningful ways.

To that end, Cambridge Public School District is pursuing the goals of racial equity and anti-racism. This handbook was written as part of that ongoing journey, and was crafted with the understanding that this iteration would not be the final version, but a starting point from which the concepts and policies in this Handbook would be revisited and refined annually for the next five years. A working group of parents/guardians/caregivers, students, administrators, and community members will be convened to review this document annually.

Each school site is responsible for conducting its School Council according to the policies and practices outlined in this Handbook. The district Family Engagement Office and Equity Office will support all School Councils with resources and training, as well as oversee School Council evaluation and accountability throughout the year.

### In this Handbook:

- Introduction
- School Council Responsibilities
- Membership
- Elections
- Meeting Procedures
- Accountability
- District Support of School Councils
- Appendix 1: Working Group members
- Appendix 2: Family Communications and Engagement Principles
- Appendix 3: School Council Legislation Full Text
- Appendix 4: School Improvement Timeline
- Appendix 5: Language Access Tools Guidelines
- Appendix 6: School Council Assessment Template
- Appendix 7: District Contacts
- Appendix 8: School Improvement Plan (SIP) Areas of Focus Template
- Appendix 9: SIP Community Engagement Feedback Form
- Appendix 10: School Council Parent / Caregiver Representative Nomination Form
- Appendix 11: Ballot Template
- Appendix 12: Council Meeting Minutes Template
- Appendix 13: School Council Recruitment One Sheet
- Appendix 14: Election/Membership Checklist for PTO/PTA

## SCHOOL COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES

In Cambridge Public Schools, the School Council has the following main responsibilities, listed below and further described later in this section:

- Adopt educational goals for the school that are consistent with local educational policies and statewide student performance standards;
- Identify the educational needs of students attending the school in the relation to the goals;
- Collaborate with school community and district instructional staff to form an **annual School Improvement Plan (SIP) to be approved by the Superintendent;**
- Review the school budget annually;
- Review the student's Rights and Responsibilities handbook regularly to ensure the school discipline policies.
- Assess student discipline data

See: Appendix 3: School Council Legislation Full Text

**School Council General Functions:** The role of the School Council is to provide **leadership to assess the school's alignment with the district's goals, mission, vision, core values** and guiding principles

It is the responsibility of the School Council to be regularly responsive to the needs of their community and to enact change to address them.

**Racial Equity:** In addition to the responsibilities mandated by the law, in Cambridge Public Schools every School Council is a mechanism for working towards racial equity in schools. The School Council will catalyze and/or participate in racial equity initiatives, and evaluate their progress and efficacy in collaboration with the general school community. **Becoming an anti-racist school will be a goal developed in collaboration and supported by every school council. School Councils will collaborate with school leadership on developing needs assessment addressed in the school improvement plan.**

The following sections provide guidelines for each responsibility of the School Council described above, including how the thread of racial equity can be woven throughout every action the School Council takes.

**Reviewing the School Budget:** Each CPS school's budget includes discretionary funds for the purchase of supplies, instructional materials and services ("General budget"), and funds to support the School Improvement and Professional Development Plans ("SIP budget"). The district's formula for allocating these funds to each school is based on a tiered funding formula that considers each school's enrollment and student need. Budget allocations for the upcoming school year are finalized when the School Committee adopts the budget each year in April. Decisions about how the general budget and SIP budget funds will be

spent are made at the school level.

Each year in October, the principal is responsible for presenting the school's general budget and the SIP budget to the Council and helping the Representatives understand the budget by answering questions. Budget conversations should include the following:

- An explanation of each of the budget types (General vs. SIP)
- A transparent, user-friendly version of the school's General and SIP budgets, created with a focus on clarity and detail, including a line item breakdown of how the school plans to spend the funds.
- An explanation about the flexibility that schools have in spending their allocated funds and that specific line items may change during the course of the year, based on school needs.
- Comparisons of the prior year SIP budget along with a accompanying SIP as an example of how the budget and SIP plan work together.
- Full record of budget conversations in the public minutes of the School Council.
- School Council's role in budgets: The School Council will review the school's general and SIP budgets to understand their contents and ask questions, but it is not their role to approve the budget.

The budget is the vehicle through which the School Councils can have rich discussions and advocate for specific uses for funding in alignment with the SIP. The Council's knowledge of the SIP budget should be in depth so that they may advise the principal and school leadership teams in building a realistic and appropriate SIP.

**SIP:** In Cambridge Public Schools, a SIP includes strategic goals, actions, and priorities based on outcomes student reflected in student achievement and social-emotional data





### Accessibility of School Council Representatives:

We believe that the success of every School Council is dependent on how the Representatives remain actively engaged and connected with the broader school community. It is the responsibility of elected Representatives to maintain an open line of communication with their communities in the following ways:

- Representatives will actively recruit their communities to attend School Council meetings, and solicit their feedback in formal settings (e.g. council meetings) and informal settings (e.g. community functions, meetups, etc.)
- Representatives' contact information (school-sponsored email address at minimum) must be available on the school's website, in printed materials about the School Council, and on meeting reminders, as well as any other place where School Council information is shared.
- Representatives will be present at a variety of school events throughout the year, where they can be introduced so the community knows who they are.
- The school will identify and stakeholder representatives as needed from the SIP.

The SIP in Cambridge generally also includes:

- Professional development for the school's staff and the allocation of any professional development funds in the school budget, including the need for teachers' professional development on second language acquisition and on working with culturally and linguistically diverse student populations.
- Means for meeting, within the regular education programs at the school, the diverse learning needs of as many children as possible, including children with special needs currently assigned to separate programs.
- An associated SIP budget for meeting the goals and actions listed.
- Any further subjects the School Council shall consider appropriate

Reference: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/leadership/advisory/schoolcouncils/part2e.html>

SIPs allow for school communities to identify priority areas of academic and social emotional focus as well as name the strategies that will be employed to accomplish the goals set in the SIP. SIPs are important in communicating with all stakeholders and support accountability as school communities make strides towards their targeted goals. SIPs should be used as an anchor document that is a reminder of what are priorities of a school community.

The Curriculum and Instruction (CIT) Team facilitates SIP process across our 18 schools through team SIP reviews and feedback, school site visits, connecting departments around specific needs, and providing time and space to reflect as leaders and leadership teams to improve outcomes for all students. The CIT and principal will continue to expand elements of this collaborative process throughout the school year.





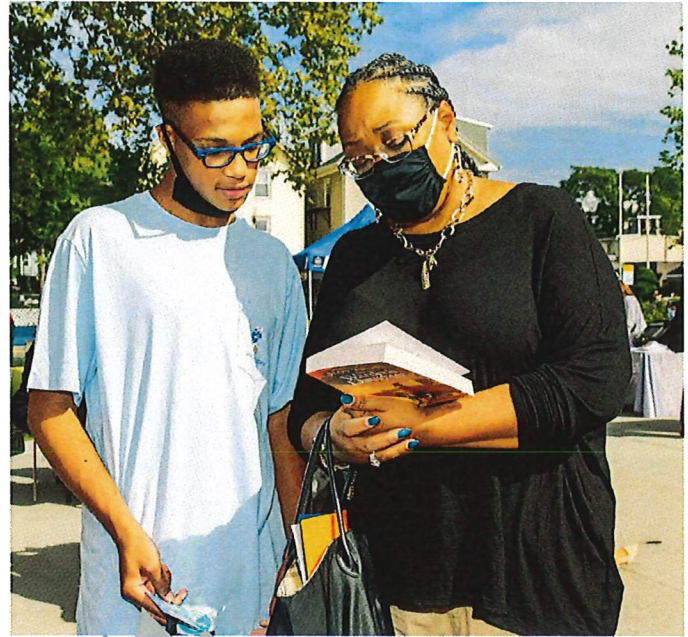
## MEMBERSHIP

In Cambridge Public Schools, we are committed to ensuring that each School Council is representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the entire school community that it serves, pursuant to the Education Code, as well as District priorities. We defined a “representative” school council that is inclusive and as diverse in all the ways that Cambridge is diverse: with individuals who reflect each school community’s diversity in racial and ethnic identities, language, learning differences, academic need, ability, and culture. The School Council should also include representatives from multiple grade bands present at the school, and students at the middle and secondary levels.

### School Council Composition:

Each School Council is Co-Chaired by the Principal and one Parent/Guardian/Caregiver member. The Council will include between 4-6 Parent/Guardian/Caregiver Representatives (not including the Council Parent Co-Chair), between 4-6 Staff Representatives (not including the Principal), two Student Representatives (at the secondary level), and between 2-3 Community Representatives, defined below. Regardless of the size of the School Council, parity is defined as equal numbers of Parent/Guardian/Caregivers and Principal/Staff). Each of the above Council members are defined as voting members and have special responsibilities outlined below:

1. Parent/Guardian/Caregiver Representatives may be any parent of a current student at the school who is not a member of any of the other membership categories.
2. Staff Representatives are any education staff member (teachers, special ed, and paraprofessionals).
3. Community Representatives are recommended by the Representatives and the general community, and invited to join by the Principal, and may include 2-3 stakeholder/supporters of the school, such as: counseling or related service providers, community partners, and Cambridge residents or organizations.
4. Student Representatives are members of the current student body. If there is a Student Council, the Student Representative should be a member of the current Student Council. If there is no Student Council, the Student Representative should be elected by the entire student body.
5. The school Family Liaison will be a permanent, non-voting member of the School Council in order to provide continuity as elected Representatives turn over throughout the years.



### Terms

- Parent/Guardian/Caregiver Representatives will commit to serving staggered two-year terms, and may serve on the School Council for up to two consecutive terms (four years), as long as their child remains at the school. Terms run from the month in which Representatives are elected, for two years (e.g. May 2022 - May 2024), but with no meetings taking place in July and August.
- Staff Representatives will commit to serving staggered two-year terms, and may serve up to two consecutive terms (four years). Terms run from May in which Representatives are elected, for two years (e.g. May 2022 - May 2024), but with no meetings taking place in July and August.
- Community Representatives do not have set terms or term limits.
- Student Representatives will commit to serving one year terms. Terms run from May in which Representatives are elected, for one year (e.g. May 2022 - May 2024), but with no meetings taking place in July and August.

### Roles and Responsibilities:

- **Co-chairs:** The duty of the Co-chairs is to jointly oversee and direct the Committee's meetings in a fair and productive manner. This includes preparing an agenda for each meeting and directing the discussions in a way that promotes clarity, understanding, and a full hearing of all views in a concise and respectful manner.
- **Recording Secretary:** The duty of this position is to take and keep minutes (date, time, place, members present and absent, voting records, and actions taken) of all council meetings and distribute the minutes after each meeting for review and approval. This can be a rotating position or a set position for the year.

- **Representatives:** The Representatives of the council act as a link between the council and the school community. Representatives will regularly participate in council meetings and should provide feedback on council issues, introduce discussion points for meetings and vote on discussed topics. Representatives are encouraged to promote council awareness and participation within the school community and participate in subcommittees, school activities and School Committee meetings that affect the council's overarching goals and objectives.
- **Family Liaisons:** The Family Liaisons may help the Co-Chairs work together effectively, aid in the recruitment of new Parent / Guardian / Caregiver Representatives, and keep an open line of communication between the School Council and the general school community. They may also coordinate between School Councils at other schools through the network of Family Liaisons.
- There was a meeting held in Summer 2021.

Non-elected and non-voting members of every school community, including students, can attend meetings and are warmly encouraged to participate in all discussions and deliberations.

## ELECTIONS

In Cambridge Public Schools, we recognize that it is crucial to the District's commitment to equity that law-mandated elections are conducted in a manner that guarantees accessibility for all, and that election procedures are standardized and rooted in best practice across the District. We acknowledge that elections, by their nature, can be exclusive of marginalized voices, and we strive in the following section to imagine practices that are inclusive for all, especially those who have historically been left out of many School Councils in our District.

See: Appendix 3: School Council Legislation, Full Text Reference: [https://bit.ly/legislation\\_link3](https://bit.ly/legislation_link3)

Each school is responsible for ensuring that their School Council elections for Parent/Guardian/Caregiver, Staff, and (at CRLS & Upper Schools) Student Representatives take place and adhere to the law and the following guidelines.

### Responsibility for elections:

**Elections will be held at every school every May to replace Representatives whose terms are ending. The results of the elections will be determined in time for the School Council to hold its first training in June and subsequent first meeting in September of the following school year.**

- Elections of the Staff Representatives will be held in a separate, representative process organized by the school staff during the month of May. Only staff members are eligible to vote in this election.

- Elections of the Student Representative(s) will be held through the Student Council elections, or some other school-wide election process. It is recommended that the Student Representative to the School Council position be a separate position on the ballot for Student Council elections, or folded into the job description of another elected member of the Student Council, such as the President or Vice President. Only students are eligible to vote in this election.
- The procedural responsibility of the Parent/Guardian/Caregiver election process falls to the school's parent organization, the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO/PTA). If the school does not have a PTO/PTA, any parent organization that is recognized by the school can hold School Council elections. Only parents/guardians/caregivers are eligible to vote in the election. If the parent organization would benefit from support and guidance in order to run an inclusive election, the Family Engagement Office and Equity Office will provide support.
- If there is not a parent organization to hold elections, the principal may gather a committee of parents/guardians/caregivers who are representative of the diverse community of a school (languages spoken, race/ethnicity, educational needs, etc.) or a subcommittee may be formed from the existing School Committee Representatives whose terms are not coming to close.

### Parent/Guardian/Caregiver Recruitment:

Knowledge of the election, as well as the School Council's role and responsibilities, must be available in accessible language, free from jargon, to every Parent/Guardian/Caregiver at every school. In order to ensure equity for all groups in the recruitment process, all communications must be crafted and sent according to the CPS Communications Guidelines, available in Appendix 2. Most notably:

- All materials should be translated into multiple languages, depending on the needs of the individual school community.
- A variety of communication methods should be used, including email, text, hard-copy flyer, phone calls, website, newsletters, and social media (if available).
- Announcements must be made at in-person events.
- Current School Council members, and relevant staff such as Family Liaisons and room parents/guardians/caregivers, should make and maintain continuous relationships with individual parent/guardian/caregivers to encourage them to consider running for School Council.
- Outreach to families with additional language needs by engaging bilingual liaisons, and Community Engagement Team (CET) workers.

### Additional Suggestions for Parent/Guardian/Caregiver Recruitment:

- Parent organizations holding elections may choose to make a video detailing the role and responsibilities of the School Council and the importance of Parent/Guardian/Caregiver, student, and staff involvement in the School Council.
- Volunteers can hand out fliers with recruitment and electronic information at drop-off and pick-up times, school functions, and at after-school programs.
- Volunteers can assist parents/guardians/caregivers with writing their short statement on why they would like to serve, or getting their optional picture taken for inclusion in candidacy.
- For additional suggestions, visit DESE's website.

### **Nomination:**

Parents/guardians/caregivers, students, and staff may nominate themselves or others. Submission of required nominee information should be possible via email, via mail, or via hard-copy in person.

#### *Self nomination:*

- Official nomination occurs when a Parent / Guardian / Caregiver, student, or staff member submits their name, short statement of interest, and an optional picture to the appropriate organization in charge of holding the election.

#### *Nominating someone else:*

- The nominator must submit the name, phone number and email address of the nominee.
- The **appropriate organization** holding elections must then contact the nominee and the nominee must accept the nomination by submitting a short statement on why they would like to serve on the School Council, and an optional picture to the **appropriate organization**.

Schools may choose to focus the short statement by asking nominees to respond to a short prompt question. Schools may also choose to provide an alternative to nominee photos, such an avatar or animated image, in the event that a nominee is uncomfortable with having their image shared widely.

### **Parent/Guardian/Caregiver Election Procedures:**

Each individual voter will have one vote. Cambridge Public Schools will fill open positions in the School Council with the candidate/candidates who receive the most votes. For example, if there is one position open, the candidate who receives the most votes will be offered the position. If there are three positions open, the three candidates who receive the most votes will be offered the positions, and so on. If there are the same number of candidates as there are open positions, all candidates will be offered positions after the elections. The **appropriate organization** responsible for holding elections will then:

1. Compile all candidates' names, photos, brief statements into one document. This document will be translated by school or district support staff.
2. Create both an online ballot (using Google form or some other platform) and a paper ballot, translated to all languages with significant representation at the school.
3. Share all online and paper ballot options with the entire Parent/Guardian/Caregiver community via the same or broader methods employed to solicit nominations (email, text, hard-copy flyer, phone calls, website, social media (if available), and announcements at in-person events).
4. Ballots should include a write-in option.
5. Allow for two weeks of voting to ensure that all community members have the opportunity to vote.
6. Tally the votes, inform the candidates so they may accept or decline their positions.
7. Results will be posted in school and included in the school newsletter and website.

### **Community Member Recruitment and Invitation:**

Community members can be recommended for the School Council by any member of the community or by members of the School Council. The principal will reach out to invite potential Community Members to join the School Council.



## MEETING PROCEDURES

**In Cambridge Public Schools:** One of the goals of this handbook is to standardize School Council practices throughout the district, including by creating a general meeting process. The sections below attempt to balance the need for standardization across all Cambridge Public Schools, and the flexibility to meet the needs of many diverse school communities.

### Addressing barriers to participation:

- **Meeting frequency and time:** Meetings will be held once per month on consistent days (e.g. first Thursday of every month), with additional sessions held as needed. Meeting time will be determined by the availability of the school community, with special consideration given to families of color and other groups whose participation is often not adequately prioritized. The dates, times and location will be determined prior to the first meeting of the school year and advertised to all families, staff, and students via email, text, hard-copy flyer, phone calls, website, social media (if available), and announcements at in-person events.
- **Meeting notice:** In addition to the 48 hours advance notice required by the Open Meeting Law, all meetings, along with the proposed agenda and registration link, will be posted at least one week in advance at school, on the school website, and via email out to the school community. Notices should also be posted where both elementary and secondary students can access them, such as in common areas, lunchrooms, and outside bulletin boards.
- **Meeting platform:** Meetings will be held in-person at the school, or other central locations decided upon by the community, and be available via Zoom simultaneously in order to lower the barriers to attendance for many families. A hybrid of in-person and online options will enable all attendees to be welcomed as full participants. The Zoom link will be open with a registration requirement, and participants will be able to register at least a week in advance. The Zoom link will then be sent to all registrants approximately 30 minutes in advance of the meeting.
- **Meeting Hospitality:** Schools are encouraged to find creative means to provide hospitality for meeting attendees, such as food and childcare during meetings.
- **Language Services:** Language accessibility services, such as translators in-person or closed captioning services, should be provided at every meeting in the languages appropriate for each school community. Schools will handle this responsibility according to the Translations, Interpreters, and Language Access Tools Guidelines, available Appendix 5. If a school needs additional support, they can contact the Family Engagement Office and Equity Office.

### Addressing the interests of a broad school community:

- **Agenda and Participation:** Non-Representative attendees should have a clear understanding that they have the right to ask questions and make comments during the meetings. Each meeting must include time for public comment. If members of the general community would like to propose topics for discussion, they can reach out to a Representative in advance to suggest that the School Council discuss an issue.

The agenda of each School Council meeting should be created by the Council Co-Chairs, in collaboration with the full Council and the school community. This can be achieved in a variety of ways: open calls for agenda items sent out with the minutes of the previous meeting, listening sessions with the school community around specific issues/campaigns, ongoing outreach by elected representatives who “sponsor” agenda items that are brought to them by community members, allowing attendees to add proposed agenda items to discuss at the following meeting at the conclusion of the previous meeting, etc.

### Meeting minutes must include:

- the date, time and place of the meeting;
- the members present or absent;
- the decisions made and actions taken, including a record of all votes;
- a summary of the discussions on each subject;
- a list of all documents and exhibits used at the meeting; and
- the name of any member who participated in the meeting remotely.

They will be recorded by the Recording Secretary and should have all technical language and educational jargon, abbreviations, etc. defined in plain language.

### Subcommittee meetings:

- School Councils are encouraged to establish subcommittees or working groups to work towards various objectives of the Council. These groups will include members of the general school community, and at least one elected School Council Representative. Subcommittee/working groups are an effective strategy for diversifying and increasing participation in the work of the School Council.

Subcommittee meetings are subject to the open meeting law and must be noticed in the same manner as all School Council meetings. Minutes must be taken and presented to the full school council during a public meeting to ensure transparency and given the general public time

for public comment. All work completed by the subcommittees in working sessions must be presented to the full School Council during a public meeting to ensure transparency and give the general public a time for comment.

#### Open Meeting Law:

The Open Meeting Law applies to all public meetings. Based on the Open Meeting Law, the major requirements of School Council are:

- Hold all meetings in public and allow anyone in attendance to audio and/or video-tape the proceedings as long as it is not disruptive to the meeting.
- File the notice for each meeting with the City Clerk with enough time to permit posting of the notice of each meeting 48 hours in advance, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays. Also in terms of making sure sufficient time is taken into account in filing the notices with the City Clerk for timely posting, it should also be noted that the City Clerk's office closes at noon on Fridays. Meeting notices must be posted in a legible, easily understandable format; contain the date, time, and place of the meeting; and list all topics that the co-chairs reasonably anticipate will be discussed at the meeting. The list of topics must be sufficiently specific to reasonably inform the public of the issues to be discussed at the meeting. The principal, as co-chair, shall be responsible for filing the notice for each meeting with the City Clerk in accordance with the systems that have been put in place to ensure compliance with Open Meeting Law requirements.
- Keep minutes indicating the date, time and place of the meeting; the members present/absent; the decisions made and actions taken, including a record of all votes, a summary of the discussions on each subject, a list of all documents and exhibits used at the meeting; and the name of any member who participated in the meeting remotely.
- Adhere to a quorum, which is to be defined as a majority of the council members.

Law: [https://bit.ly/open\\_meeting\\_law](https://bit.ly/open_meeting_law)

Reference: [https://bit.ly/open\\_meeting\\_law\\_reference](https://bit.ly/open_meeting_law_reference)

Some Open Meeting Law notes specific to Cambridge Public Schools:

- Each meeting must include visual posting and verbal reminder that the meeting is being recorded, if that particular meeting is recorded. Participants' choice to be present is their consent to be recorded.
- Meetings will be posted a week in advance on the school website, and emailed out the school community.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

### In Cambridge Public Schools:

All School Councils in Cambridge Public Schools are elected bodies and, therefore, accountable to the school communities they serve. Each School Council is accountable for its performance relative to:

1. Handbook goals and practices:
  - Diverse Council membership that is representative of the school community
  - Inclusive communication with school community
  - Equitable recruitment and election practices
  - Welcoming meeting procedures
  - The school council will function under norms centered inequitable anti-bias/anti-racist practices
  - Transparency in engagement with the school community
2. Support of the School Improvement Plan (SIP):
  - Update the priorities based on the SIP template. As of January 2023 a new SIP template is being developed, and these priorities will be updated accordingly.
  - Provide all CPS educators with cultural proficiency training and implement ongoing cultural proficiency professional learning in all schools
  - Expand rigorous, joyful, culturally responsive learning experiences
  - Develop and expand effective inclusive practices in all classrooms
  - Implement a social, emotional and behavioral learning framework
  - Engage families as partners with formal ongoing mechanisms that create differentiated opportunities for family voice and engagement

### School Council Assessment Process:

The School Council will set goals relative to the above goals of the Handbook and the SIP, and then evaluate their progress against these goals twice throughout the year following the calendar below:

- September/October: document the goals of the School Council for the year
- February: self-evaluation of progress relative to the goals
- June: review of accomplishments of the year and the goals that were not fully achieved

See Appendix 6 for the School Council Assessment Template.

In February and June, the school community will also be asked to complete surveys about the School Council's success in the areas of the handbook practices (i.e. communication, inclusivity, elections, etc.) and their support of the SIP educational goals. The School Council's self assessments and the community feedback will be submitted for review in October, February, and June to a School Council Oversight Committee made up of a team of School Council members from across the district, community partners, and district personnel.

**Legal Accountability:**

If the School Council has questions about its accountability to the law, the law is referenced in the appendix of this handbook, as well as discussed on the DESE website in great detail. If a member of the school community has questions about the legality of the proceedings of a School Council, they can address their concerns first to the school principal (Co-Chair of School Council). If the principal does not address their concerns, the next person to speak to is the Assistant Superintendent in charge of the relevant grade-band, followed by the Superintendent, and finally the School Committee. The staff at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education are always available to answer questions as well. Please see Appendix 7.



**DISTRICT SUPPORT OF SCHOOL COUNCILS**

**In Cambridge Public Schools:**

While each individual school is responsible for steering its own School Council, the Equity and Family Engagement Offices will host some centralized processes and offer support in additional ways, specifically as a source of resources and training.

**General Support:**

The district will house certain supports to create consistency across School Councils and to establish a clear pathway of support between individual Schools Councils and district staff, such as the Office of Family Engagement, Office of Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, and Technology Services.

**Training:** The district recognizes that being a Representative might seem overwhelming at first, especially for parents/guardians/caregivers whose main employment is not in education. The Equity and Family Engagement Offices will offer training every year in June for incoming and continuing School Council members. The training will include information about the main responsibilities and goals of the School Council:

- Understanding and reviewing the school improvement plan budget
- Understanding and updating the School Improvement Plan
- Practicing anti-racism throughout School Council procedures and practices
- Engaging the general school community
- Inclusive communication with school community
- Welcoming meeting procedures
- Equitable recruitment and election practices
- State and federal laws on school council rights and responsibilities, on Open Meeting Laws, as well as on rights and responsibilities of all elected representatives in Massachusetts

Training will take place for all new and existing School Council members each year. The Equity and Family Engagement Offices will host an additional opportunity each year for school councils to come together to network and learn from each other.

**Communication:** A core element of accessible and equity-centered communication practices is translation and interpretation services. Schools should follow the district's procedures outlined in the Translations, Interpreters, and Language Access Tools Guidelines, available Appendix 5. Schools will utilize their existing school budget for translation services, and if they require additional funding, they can reach out to the Equity and Family Engagement Offices for support.

**Election Support:** Running inclusive and equitable elections requires specific knowledge and resources that all parent organizations, such as Parent Teacher Organizations, may not possess yet. Therefore, the Family Engagement and Equity offices will team up to provide additional training for the parent organizations running the elections each year. Training will support the PTO's ability to:

- Present a district-wide, standardized infrastructure and toolkit to running equitable elections, including nomination and elections procedures
- Communication practices for inclusion and accessibility, including the CPS Communications Guidelines
- Utilize anti-racist practices
- Where to find resources in the district, such as language services

- Additional suggestions for Parent / Guardian / Caregiver recruitment

In addition, in order to standardize the election process across schools, the district will host a standard voting platform online for all schools. Suggested platform for use that allows for anonymous voting:

<https://www.myvote.io/>

## HELPFUL LINKS

For guidance on School Council self-assessment and setting additional goals, please consult the following documents:

- DESE Guidance on Self-Assessment
- Montana rubric for ESSA self-assessment
- The National Standards for School-Family Partnerships, and especially standard #5

Appendix 1: Working Group members

Appendix 2: Family Communications and Engagement Principles

Appendix 3: School Council Legislation Full Text

[https://bit.ly/legislation\\_link1](https://bit.ly/legislation_link1)

[https://bit.ly/legislation\\_link2](https://bit.ly/legislation_link2)

Appendix 4: SIP Timeline

Appendix 5: Language Access Tools Guidelines

Appendix 6: School Council Assessment Template

Appendix 7: District Contacts

Appendix 8: SIP Area of Focus Template

Appendix 9: P2P Community Engagement

Feedback Form

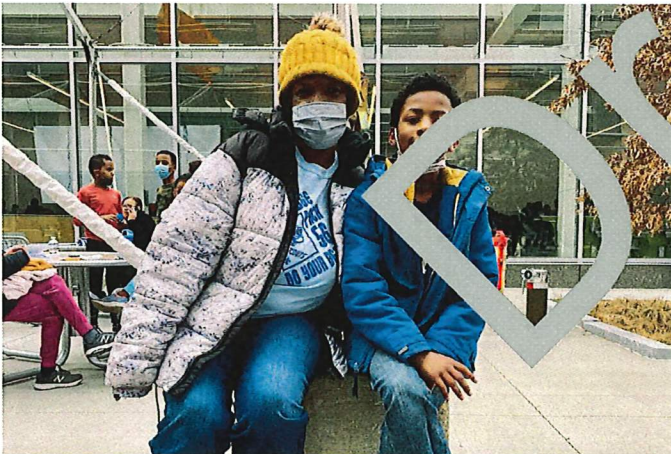
Appendix 10: Nomination Prompts

Appendix 11: Ballot Templates

Appendix 12: Council Meeting Minutes Template

Appendix 13: School Council Recruitment One Sheet

Appendix 14: Election/Membership Checklist for PTO/PTA



## APPENDIX 1

### School Council Handbook Working Group Members March - June 2021

Kim Bostic, Parent  
Alexandra Bowers, Parent  
Robin Chen, Parent  
Lovette Curry, Parent  
Neusa DaCosta, King Open Family Liaison  
Alisa De Los Santos, CPS Administrative Support  
Kristen Emack, Cambridgeport Family Liaison  
Luba Falk Feigenberg, Parent  
Chris Gerber, Kennedy Longfellow Principal  
Robin Harris, Directory of Family & Community Engagement  
Ted Hirsch, Community Member  
Alisa Khan, Parent  
Emie Michaud Weinstock, Parent  
Piotr Mitros, Parent  
Lauren Morse, Graham & Parks Family Liaison  
Jesse Nathan, Parent  
Pamela Pecchio, Parent  
Markisha Pelissier, Student  
Claire Spinner, Chief Financial Officer  
Avanti Tilak, Parent  
Robert Tynes, Peabody School Interim Principal  
Madeline Valera, Parent



# Family Communication Guiding Principles

*In Cambridge Public Schools, we recommend that all communications between families, schools, and the district are:*



## **Actively Anti-Racist & Culturally Responsive**

Always prioritize the needs of our traditionally marginalized families. To disrupt the negative effects of structural racism on families of color, we must constantly create communication practices that innovate beyond what has always been done toward what serves families best.



## **Accessible**

Ensure that communication is accessible to all families by translating communications into families' languages of choice and using visuals when and wherever possible.



## **Consistent & Centralized**

Mainstream consistency of information across all communications, platforms, and translated materials. Provide centralized platforms where information is readily available.



## **Authentic & Transparent**

Prioritize two-way communications in all strategies, engage authentically in creative dialogue with families, and practice transparency with families to the fullest extent possible.



## **Personal**

Choose personalized, in-person, or direct communication over general communication whenever possible. Recognize, value, and build on the strengths of individual families to increase the efficacy of communication.



## **Relationship-Focused**

Continuously build upon relationships whenever and wherever possible. All communications should serve to deepen connections and build trust between families and the district.

**When these guidelines are fully functional, CPS communications between families, schools, and the district could include:**

### **Actively Anti-Racist & Culturally Responsive**

- Progressive stacking used in all meetings with families and community members.
- Centering the question: “What is your vision that you have for your child?” as the focus and goal of families’, schools’ and district collaboration.
- Fully resourced engagement teams (family liaisons, administration, and staff) at each school who are empowered to focus on connecting and partnering with families of color.
- New strategies developed in collaboration with families of color to mitigate traditional communication strategies privileging white families.

### **Accessible**

- District-wide mobile app with interface in multiple languages.
- Language-based communications crafted in the languages in which they will be sent out (not only in English first).
- Definitions and explanations of all technical jargon, educational terms, acronyms, or culturally-specific concepts.

### **Consistent & Central**

- Families, especially traditionally marginalized families, are actively involved throughout the district in decision-making processes.
- Data and metrics provided in easily accessible and standard formats.

### **Authentic & Transparent**

- Consistent messaging regardless of the language, platform, or person through which it is communicated.
- An updated CPS website that is easily searchable, includes school and district calendars, and provides an opportunity for interaction with school staff.
- Less numerous but more comprehensive communications.
- Allocate space where communications can be easily located and accessed.

### **Personal**

- Regular and individualized communications between families, schools, teachers, and/or Family Liaisons in whatever format values the strengths of each family.
- Consultation with families to discover what modes and frequency of communication they prefer and would serve them best.
- Time invested in learning families’ names, greeting families outside school when possible, and holding events with families where they live and in the community.

### **Relationship-Focused**

- Initial phone calls or visits with families at the start of school to build relationships and establish an open line of communication based on mutual trust.
- Weekly check-ins with each family from a staff member whom they trust.

## APPENDIX 5

### Language Access Tools Guidelines



## Phone Interpretation Language Line

### Helpful tool for:

- ★ Family conferences
- ★ Weekly Check-in's
- ★ 1:1 family follow-up
- ★ Unplanned emergencies

Need help: contact Lavett Holloman at [lholloman@cpsd.us](mailto:lholloman@cpsd.us).

- Dial 866.999.0438
- **Tell the Operator:** I am calling from Cambridge Public Schools
- **Provide the customer code:**  
C S 2 8 1 9
- State the **language** that you need interpreted and provide **your full name**
- **Provide the billing phone number:** 617.340.6494
- Provide your **school or department name**
- Provide the **phone number and person's name** who you are trying to call

Draft

# School Council Self-Assessment Template

**About this document:** This document was made to help School Councils assess how well it is meeting its goals in its duties and goals described in the School Council Handbook, as well as any additional goals that it has set out for itself. Reflecting on its work several times each year and sharing its progress is an important way for School Councils to be accountable to the school communities they serve. This document is a template, and should be modified by each school council to serve its needs. In all cases, the assessment should be defined at the start of the year.

**Assessment Calendar:**

- **September/October:** review this document and write down any additional goals of the School Council for the year
- **February:** complete the first self-evaluation of progress relative to the goals
- **June:** complete the second self-assessment, review progress, and discuss the goals that were not fully achieved. Submit this assessment, as well as survey feedback from the school community, to the School Council Oversight Committee.

**School Name:**

**School Year:**

Please fill out the rubric by choosing the appropriate level for each goal/principle and describing your School Council's current progress in the corresponding box.

School Council Goal / Central Principle <i>(from the Handbook)</i>	Emerging: We (School Council) know about this goal/principle, and understand its importance. We may discuss it during meetings or with the community, but we haven't taken any steps to make it happen in our Council.	Progressing: We (School Council) have taken steps to make this goal/principle happen and to show its importance with the school community. This goal/principle is on its way to being central to our work.	Excelling: We (School Council) practice this goal/principle all the time and with care. This goal/principle is one of the main parts of how we engage with the school community, how we create new things, or how we function as a group.
<b>Diverse Council membership</b> that is representative of the school community.			
<b>Transparency</b> in engagement with the school community			
<b>Inclusive communication</b> with school community			
<b>Equitable recruitment</b> and election practices			

School Council Goal / Central Principle	Emerging	Progressing	Excelling
<p><b>Welcoming</b> meeting procedures</p>			
<p>School Council as a mechanism for <b>anti-racist practices</b></p>			
<p><b>Power-sharing:</b> Collaborative decision-making, and equity of voice</p>			
<p><b>Investment in parent leadership:</b> support opportunities for public speaking, advocacy, and steering committee work</p>			
<p>Create or support initiatives that support <b>academic rigor</b> and positive <b>student outcomes</b></p>			
<p>Support the <b>School Improvement Plan</b> by focusing on the priorities defined in i <i>(new priorities forthcoming in 2022)</i></p>			
<p>Review <b>student data</b> and <b>School Improvement Plan</b> data <i>(facilitated by the Equity/Family Engagement office)</i></p>			
<p>Review the <b>School Improvement Plan budget</b></p>			

Interested in making a difference at your child's school?

# JOIN YOUR SCHOOL COUNCIL!

## WHAT IS THE SCHOOL COUNCIL?

The School Council is a leadership group of diverse parents/guardians, teachers and staff, community members, and the principal. They meet every month to work towards school improvement and have conversations with the school community. The involvement of diverse people on the council, especially parents and guardians, is key.

## WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL COUNCIL DO?

The school council supports student outcomes by uniting the school's close relationship with teaching and learning in local advisory councils. Members work together to support the School Improvement Plan, existing and new programs, and family engagement.

## WHO SHOULD BE PART OF SCHOOL COUNCIL?

Any parent or guardian can run for School Council! If you are interested in:

- Collaborating with school leadership on policies and needs of the students
- Supporting teachers and families
- Brainstorming ideas on how to fulfill district goals
- Listening to caregivers, bringing forward issues that affect the whole school
- ...and can commit to one meeting per month, then the School Council is for you!

## WHY SHOULD I BE PART OF SCHOOL COUNCIL?

School Councils are a great place for parents and guardians to make a positive, meaningful impact! The work of the School Council affects the achievement and wellbeing of all children, so your ideas and involvement are so important!

## HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

Parents/Guardians/Caregivers are elected to the School Council through a simple process:

**Step 1:** Think about ideas and experience you can contribute to the school community.

**Step 2:** Nominate yourself or someone else [Enter link](#) by **Deadline**.

**Step 3:** Vote between **Dates** and encourage others to vote too!

**MORE INFORMATION:** [Link to School Council Page](#)

**VIDEO ABOUT SCHOOL COUNCILS:** [Link of video](#)

## Questions?

Email your School Council at [Enter School Council Email](#)  
or call [School Council Phoner Number](#)



(To be used by any Parent Teacher Organization)

# AT-A-GLANCE CHECKLIST FOR SCHOOL COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP AND ELECTIONS

## MEMBERSHIP

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### People on the School Council:

- 4-6 Parent/Guardian/Caregivers Representatives (not including the Council Parent Co-Chair)
- 4-6 Staff Representatives (not including the Principal)
- 2 Student Representatives (at the secondary level)
- 2-3 Community Representatives (stakeholder/supporters of the school, such as: service providers, community partners, and Cambridge residents or organizations.)
- The school's Family Liaison
- Building principal who serves as Co-Chair
- 1 Parent/Guardian/Caregivers who serves as Co-Chair
- Recording Secretary (one of the existing Representatives)

### The School Council should:

- Have "parity". Parity means that there are equal numbers of Parent/Guardian/Caregivers and Principal/Staff, no matter how big the school/councils. For example, if there are 3 teachers and the principal on the School Council, then there must be 4 Parent/Guardian/Caregiver Representatives for parity.
- Be representative of the entire school community. CPS defines a "representative" school council that is inclusive and as diverse in all the ways that Cambridge is diverse: with individuals who reflect each school community's diversity in racial and ethnic identities, language, learning differences, academic level, ability, and culture

## Parent/Guardian/Caregiver ELECTION CHECKLIST TIMELINE:

---

CPS is committed to racial equity, and believes that School Councils should be a mechanism for anti-racism. This checklist is meant to support each PTO/Friends Of group as they work towards the goals of inclusive and equitable recruitment and election processes.

### April (K-5) / Early September (6-12):

- Decide which Parent Teacher Organization (PTO/PTA) will hold the elections. If the school does not have a PTO/PTA, see Handbook for options.
- Decide how many seats are up for election, based on how many open seats there are, number of staff on the School Council, and how many Parent/Guardian/Caregivers are finishing their two year terms.
- Build recruitment materials:
  - Knowledge of the election, as well as the School Council's role and responsibilities, must be available in accessible language, free from jargon, to every Parent/Guardian/Caregivers at every school.
  - Ensure that all communications are written and sent according to the CPS Communications Guidelines.

# AT-A-GLANCE CHECKLIST FOR SCHOOL COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP AND ELECTIONS

## Parent/Guardian/Caregivers/Caregivers ELECTION CHECKLIST TIMELINE:

- Translate all materials into multiple languages, depending on the needs of the individual school community.
- Recruit Parent/Guardian/Caregiver candidates:
  - Contact the Office of Family Engagement to learn about district-wide recruitment
  - Get the word out using many communication methods: email, text, hard-copy flyer, phone calls, website, newsletters, and social media (if available).
  - Make announcements at in-person events.
  - Ask current School Council members, and relevant staff such as Family Liaisons and room parents, to encourage individual Parent/Guardian/Caregivers to run.
  - Work with bilingual liaisons, and Community Engagement Team (CET) workers to connect with families with additional language needs by engaging
    - Come up with creative methods to get the word out to all potential Parent/Guardian/Caregiver candidates. (Additional suggestions for recruitment can be found in the Elections section of the School Council Handbook.)

### May (K-5) / Late September (6-12):

- Open nominations for at least two weeks.
- Create an online ballot (using [Google form](#) or some other platform) and a paper ballot.
  - Collect all candidates' names and answers into one ballot.
  - Translate the ballot to all languages spoken at the school.
  - Add a write-in option to the ballot.
- Share all online and paper ballot options with the entire community.
  - Use the same or broader methods employed to solicit nominations (email, text, hard-copy flyer, phone calls, website, social media (if available), and announcements at in-person events).
- Open voting for at least two weeks to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to vote.
  - Do a "last call" for voting at the end of the voting time.
  - Tally the votes.
  - Let the candidates know the results first so that they may accept or decline
- Communicate the results through all channels (email, text, hard-copy flyer, phone calls, website, social media) and post results in the school newsletter, website, and office
- Plan the School Council Training for newly elected members.

### June (K-5) / October (6-12):

- Hold the first School Council training for the newly elected members.