

Graham & Parks School Council
Cambridge, MA

Meeting Minutes

March 14, 2024

5:30 – 7:00 pm in person and via zoom

School Council Meeting Norms

Take an inquiry stance

Ground statements in evidence

Speak your truth and be open to other perspectives

Hear all voices and stick to protocol

Start and end on time

Be here now

1. Meeting Convened @5:30 pm by Co-Chair Christian Henry

The Roll was called by the School Council Secretary at 5:31pm, with all members present:

Administrative Appointees: Dr. Kathleen Smith – Principal & Co-chair, Lauren Morse – Family Liaison; Jodi Rich – Community Representative; Aboma Dirbaba - Community Representative

Educator and staff representatives: Debra Gadsen-Holiday (Secretary), Melissa Mihos, Kaitlin Baumann, Karima Cherguaoui, Talia Greenberg

Family and caregiver representatives: Nasrin Belali, Mary Hermann, Christian Henry (Co-Chair), Genie Marshall, Gwen Savych

Two members of the public addressed the co-chair with notice that they intended to audio record the meeting, and an announcement was made to that effect.

2. Motion to Convene in Executive Session

A motion to convene in executive session was made at 5:33pm by Genie Marshall for the purposes of discussing charges brought against the Graham & Parks School Council with respect to the March 1, 2024 open meeting law complaint filed by Anna Shin. Votes may be taken and the Graham & Parks School Council will reconvene in regular session. The motion was seconded by Kaitlin Baumann. The motion passed unanimously in a roll call vote by all voting members present:

Administrative Appointees: Dr. Kathleen Smith – Principal & Co-chair; Jodi Rich – Community Representative; Aboma Dirbaba - Community Representative

Educator and staff representatives: Debra Gadsen-Holiday (Secretary), Melissa Mihos, Kaitlin Baumann, Karima Cherguaoui, Talia Greenberg:Present

Family and caregiver representatives: Nasrin Belali, Mary Hermann, Christian Henry (Co-Chair), Genie Marshall, Gwen Savych

3. Introductions & Opening

- Review notes from January 11 School Council Meeting
- Feedback
- Follow up to Community Comment

At 6:05pm, the School Council reconvened in regular session. Dr. Smith shared the School Norms. She then shared feedback of what went well (“Plus”) and what we could have done better (“Deltas”) based on the feedback from the School Council meeting held on January 11, 2024:

2023-2024 Graham & Parks School Council Members

Administrative Appointees: Dr. Kathleen Smith – Principal & Co-chair, Lauren Morse – Family Liaison; Jodi Rich – Community Representative; Aboma Dirbaba - Community Representative

Educator and staff representatives: Debra Gadsen-Holiday (Secretary), Melissa Mihos, Kaitlin Baumann, Karima Cherguaoui, Talia Greenberg

Family and caregiver representatives: Nasrin Belali, Mary Hermann, Christian Henry (Co-Chair), Genie Marshall, Gwen Savych

- Plus/Deltas
 - **Highlights from Plus: What went well.**
 - Loved **hearing from the teachers about the goals in the SIP**. It gave a much more tangible understanding of the progress.
 - I think **small group work** was good. Parents got to ask clarifying questions and the presence of the school council members in each group was helpful in answering parents' questions. Everybody was engaged and got to talk.
 - Loved the structure with detail from the G&P summit + tying that into an activity for attendees related to the SIP. I **enjoyed talking to other parents and staff in my group** and hearing from others about different parts of the SIP. I also really enjoyed the **PD updates from teachers and staff**. I had no idea those things were happening!
 - **Highlights from Deltas: What can We do better.**
 - **Public Comment**
 - I think public comment is important but it **should be relevant** to the agenda.
 - We **could have answered the questions during that meeting because they were straight forward** and each could have been answered by a volunteer.
 - **Sticking to protocol was difficult** in my small group. It would be helpful to frame the importance of hearing all voices before starting breakout groups.

Follow up from Public Comment:

- Involving Caregivers in Equity Work
 - Dr. Smith articulated that this is a priority for our school. A series of actions are planned and coming soon.
- Agenda
 - The agenda for the current meeting was posted this past Thursday (March 7, 2024) , one week before the meeting.
- Principal's Coffee
 - Various perspectives were shared about the December 2023 Principal's Coffee.
 - The history of Coffee's at G&P is that there have been a range of topics and presenters / facilitators, not just the Principal.

4. School Administration Report
 - Staffing & Professional Development Updates
 - Facilities Updates

Professional Development Update: March 5 professional development day

At 6:18pm several educators on the council shared their various experiences in recent sessions which were segmented according to teaching focus or specialty:

- Multi language (ML) department: This professional development session was much more focused on the needs of sheltered English immersion (SEI) students, and their growth in learning. Another staff member that attended that session shared that they looked at data of ML students more holistically and not in comparison to non-ML students. They also spent time reviewing the new English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum that SEI teachers have

implemented this year.

- Math Department: This session was primarily focused on the new Math Curriculum and they were able to reflect on some of the Kindergarten lessons and what is going well with the IM curriculum.
- Literacy Coaches and Interventionists focused on looking at mClass student data. Graham & Parks has had many successes in student outcomes worth celebrating! They also spent time planning grade 3-5 interventions and sharing resources for planning those lessons.

Facilities Update:

- Some flooring has asbestos under tiles, and a recently identified issue of a broken tile in a classroom has been addressed by a special maintenance effort. A full removal and remediation project for the last remaining portions are going out to bid shortly, to be replaced over the Summer. There has been a mitigation plan in place across the building for some time now. Several floors were replaced in past years, during the summer. The plan is for the final floors to be replaced this summer.
- The condition of the surface of the school's main entryway has been identified as needing repair and upgrading. A process is underway to plan and mobilize resources to address the need.

5. Graham & Park School Budget

- G&P School Budget Presentation
- Small Group Discussion
- Whole Group Share Out

6. At 6:25pm Principal Kathleen Smith shared a presentation and spoke to the overall structure and specific allocation amounts in the 2023-2024 Graham & Park School Budget: [G&P Budget Presentation Slides](#)

- Dr Smith emphasized the slides that showed the Cambridge Public School district's formula for allocating staffing across schools according to 3 determinants:

Tier 1: ALL Schools allocations - each school receives a standard allotment of roles: administrators, educators, and staff.

Tier 2: Enrollment based - each school's specific enrollment size is factored into the number of educators and staff.

Tier 3: Student Need based - each school's set of specific student needs are considered when making staffing allocations across schools at the district level.

- Paraprofessionals Allocation:
 - 1 General Education paraprofessional per Kindergarten classroom.
 - 1 SEI paraprofessional per SEI classroom
 - 5 General Education paraprofessionals for grades 1-5
 - Additional paraprofessionals at G&P are for Special Education programs
- Small Group Discussion:

We moved into several small group discussions @ 6:38 pm. provided handouts of the slides from the budget presentation to support the noticings and wonderings.

- Noticings and Wonderings Share Out: In the interest of time, and without objection, small groups were offered the choice to share their written noticings and wonderings directly with the Secretary for inclusion in the minutes (please see below).

Noticings and Wonderings from small Groups:

Noticings:

- School staffing is specifically allocated by district
- Support implementation of the Second Step Curriculum seems low at \$455

- After salaries and maintenance there is not a lot of money leftover
- Additional staff training is also under school-directed spending
 - Changed an assumption that it came only from the district budget
- The district allocates 5 para-professionals per school at grades 1-5 in Gen-Ed.
- The allocation for staff development is very encouraging to see
- Would also like to see more allocation for caregivers, especially when it comes to caregivers of color
 - Engaging our families in our Sheltered English Immersion program
 - In the past there was a program that connected a family within SEI to another family in the building, native to Cambridge and the school
- The Cambridge allocation per student is \$40,000, the average for the state is around \$20,000
- \$6.4 M to staff a school
- How little money is available for creative/flexible/discretionary purposes to support all the different categories.
- \$20,000 to Henry Turner is a lot compared to any other line items, besides instructional support.
- The portion of the school budget controlled at the school level is small-5%.

Wonderings:

- How will the new literacy program be budgeted? Will it be similar to how IM was funded? When we do curriculum changes, how do we budget ahead?
- How can we budget in time and money to:
 1. Educate parents on new curriculums/reports?
 2. How to support ML caregivers with new curriculums/reports?
 3. Accessing supporting materials from mClass and to provide support at home & partner with teachers?
 4. Could training for understanding reports/new curriculums be done more than once, not just when curriculums are new? There are new cohorts of parents each year who need support, not just those in the first year of implementation.
- *Do enrollment/student-based need staffing allocations by CPSD meet the needs of G&P? Is there discussion at the district level to understand if needs are being met?
- More explanation of Henry Turner's work with staff
- Additional information of what is fully discretionary for G&P
- Does travel include the student field trips?
 - In the past students used to have field trips that were sleep away experiences
 - We are thinking that comes out of the field trip budget?
- How is it decided which staff get which training?
 - District PD is mandated
 - Dependent on curriculum
- Why is there such an emphasis on fundraising from the Friends of Graham and Parks?
 - Why would that be needed considering how extensive this budget is?
 - Most of the busses are covered by Friends of Graham and Parks
 - Small allocation from the district that is enrollment based
 - Perhaps some of the fundraising is connected to the idea that we do not want to ask families to pay
- How does our allocation compare to other schools in the district?
 - It would vary depending on the programs, but would still be interesting to see
- Referencing the Pie Chart: Are all of the line items under the Total Budget?
- How do slides 18-22 relate to slide 17? Does it all add up, or is it in addition to?
- What drives the enrollment caps and fluctuating class sizes? How does this fluctuation result in staffing allocations? Especially SEI Classroom fluctuation.

- How or does the budget shift based on shifting enrollment numbers?
- Can budget allocation change throughout the year? (Discretionary money per student)
- Does Special Education funding change as new IEP's get added throughout the year?

7. Family Liaison Update

- Talking Circles
- Literacy Night & Principal's Coffee on Literacy
- Upcoming events

At 6:50pm. Lauren Morse, a Graham & Parks Family Liaison offered an update to the Council.

- Talking Circles are going well. Caregivers and families are encouraged to attend. You can attend another circle as you wish.
- Literacy Night was a huge success! So many families attended. The varied activities geared towards all grades, supported student engagement.
- Principal's Coffee on Literacy: On Monday March 11, 2024 the JK-12 Director of ELA/Literacy in Cambridge Public Schools Emily Bryan came to share about the new ELA Curriculum called "CKLA" (Core Knowledge Language Arts) that will be implemented next year in grades 1-5 after extensive educator dialogue, research, visiting other school districts, and planning within Cambridge. Thank you for attending and ask about learning more!

Upcoming events:

- Read Around the World event is planned for Multilingual Learner families where stories from around the world will be read and celebrated.
- May 8: Staff Appreciation Luncheon *More details to come.

Friends of Graham & Parks Event Update:

- Family Coffees are planned before each of the upcoming student music concerts from 8-8:45am. These will be informal settings for families to connect with each other. There will be name tags and coffee!
- Monthly Meeting on April 1, 2024. They will also be on zoom for those who wish to join online. All are welcome to attend!
- Movie Night on April 5, 2024.
- May 4th: International Games Day: Host a table with a favorite game from anywhere in the world! There will be an International Cookie Swap as well.

8. Community Comment

At 7:02pm the meeting was opened for Community Comment.

- Suggestion was made for handouts and details from the in-meeting presentations to be given out ahead of time.
- Follow-up from the conversation about securing additional master's student interns to supplement classroom staffing. When will the initiative be up and running? Will we have interns in classrooms next year?
- Thank you for the talking circles! A great way to bring a community together! The facilitator was authentic and the process was very rich.
- I would like to see 2 adults in every classroom. It makes the job of teaching so much more collaborative and supportive. It also provides for a better learning environment for students. Teacher level support should be

prioritized as a line item in the budget. If this is not going to be prioritized, could families and caregivers push the district to put money toward this initiative?

- I have been talking with other Room parents and families from SEI class rooms. There have been some intentional bridges built between Gen-Ed and SEI classrooms and students. An example is having students between multiple classrooms come together for learning activities. This makes a big difference in bringing our community together. Would like us to be more intentional as a community to make connections with other families. Especially those in SEI classrooms.
- School Staffing Tiers: Would like to hear more input from teachers if these tier allocations are in fact meeting the needs of our students. If not, how can we push the District leaders to make this a priority?
- How are decisions around student allocations in terms of class size? Class size seems bigger for lower grades.
- Room Parents should work towards bringing the community together. But this is difficult when the district sends out an email with a mandate around the use of student/family contact information. This email didn't build community.
- The email detailing permitted use of student/family contact information made some feel unwelcome as a room parent because it was sent just to G&P families.
- March 8, 2024 was Women's International History Day. Does G&P have a plan to celebrate our girls this month?
- Page numbers on handouts will be helpful.
- We need to build back our G&P community. We need to make this a priority. Tonight seemed/felt like a step in the right direction.

9. Meeting Adjourned @ 7:22 pm by a motion by Talia Greenberg

The motion was seconded by Mary Hermann, and the motion passed by unanimous vote.