

KING OPEN SCHOOL COUNCIL
(Official Minutes)

School Council Meeting

Called for 6:00-7:30PM at the King Open School, 850 Cambridge St, Cambridge MA 02141

School Council Members Present: Principal Williams (Chair), VP May Petrov, Ada Riggins, , Izzy Pereira, Bucky O’Hare, Neusa DaCosta, Jaenine Cortazar Rodriguez, Jackie Gantzer, Alison Munroe, Shalini Ayre (Minutes), Jose Jimenez, Ruth Jones, Aram Harrow.

School Council Members Absent: Kate McGovern (Co-Chair), Amber Villa, Liz Rando.

Also Present: Emily Bryan, Director, PreK-12 ELA/Literacy, KO parents.

A quorum of the King Open School Council being present, the Vice Principal, May Petrov called the meeting to order at 6.10pm, Wednesday March 20th, 2024, and read the call of the meeting.

Agenda:

I. Presentation on Core Knowledge Language Arts (by Jaenine Cortazar, KO Literacy Coach, and Emily Bryan, CPSD Director of Literacy)

- How was this curriculum chosen?
- What will the curriculum be like for our students?
- How will teachers be trained in this curriculum?
- Q&A about the program

II. Discussion on District Climate Survey Results specifically King Open School results from families, staff, and children.

Overview

Literacy instruction is crucial for students' communication, self-expression, and access to opportunities. The department aims to empower students with the tools to use literacy as a tool for communication, self-expression, access, and agency. Speakers emphasized the importance of data-driven instruction, team coaching, and a solid curriculum to address the opportunity gap faced by students, particularly those with high needs. They also discussed the science of reading and its impact on reading comprehension, as well as the challenges of managing emotional dysregulation in the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic. Speakers emphasized the need to support teachers to better support students in managing emotional dysregulation during the pandemic.

Minutes:

- Personal feelings and community check-in

I. Curriculum adoption and literacy presentation.

- Emily shared their passion for KO’s bilingual program and its importance in empowering students with literacy skills. Also emphasized ELA department's vision to empower students to use literacy as a tool for communication, self-expression, access, and agency.
- Emily emphasized the importance of aligning curriculum materials and practices across the district to improve instruction and equity.

- The district has identified areas for growth, including a lack of research-based materials and inconsistent phonics instruction, and is working to address these issues through professional development and curriculum alignment.
- Reading comprehension and the achievement gap.
 - Emily highlighted the opportunity gap in CPS schools, where 85% of students without high needs are proficient, compared to 36% of students with high needs.
 - Explained that the science of reading is based on a large body of research that has shown that decoding (the ability to read words) times language comprehension (the ability to make meaning from words) equals reading comprehension.
 - Emily demonstrated how a student can comprehend little but answer questions correctly due to grammar knowledge, highlighting the power of culture and language.
- Literacy instruction and curriculum adoption in a school district.
 - Emily highlighted that 20% of students in the district are performing below grade level in phonics, which can impact comprehension.
 - The current curriculum does not align with the science of reading, leading to a need for urgent action in the classroom.
- Despite being the top choice, the program is not perfect, and the district aims to build on and improve it each year.
- The curriculum for English Language Arts (ELA) in grades 1-5, highlighting the skill strand (phonics, phonological awareness, etc.) and knowledge strand (comprehension of complex texts in social studies and science).
- Discussed AMPLIFi, a program that provides equitable access to instruction for students, including those who are English language learners.
 - The program includes a digital platform with Decodable texts, sound library, songs, videos, and ESL programming, as well as an intervention program and dual language program.
- Curriculum and resources for closing the opportunity gap.
 - Research units in Spanish dual language programs available on a variety of topics.
- Amplifi program is being revised to add more diversity and perspective, with a focus on inclusivity and flexibility.
- Emily explained how the district's plan addresses the opportunity gap by providing loaner Chromebooks and hotspots for students who don't have access to computers at home.
- Emily explained that the program is not a traditional textbook, but rather a collection of materials in one place, including student readers and digital resources.
- The program was piloted in various districts and received positive feedback.
- Education program goals and assessment.
 - Suggestion made using pre and post assessments to measure growth in middle schools.
- Concern expressed about teaching struggling students, Emily addressed the issue by highlighting the program's built-in accountability.
- Emily emphasized the importance of giving educators grace in the first year of implementing a new curriculum, acknowledging it will take time for students to adjust and for teachers to adapt.
- Concerns expressed about teacher burnout and the potential for overwhelming educators with too many new tools and strategies.

- o The district plans to provide professional development days for teachers to learn and implement the new curriculum.
- Suggested using team coaching to improve ELA instruction, similar to how math has adopted a similar model.
- The School Council thanks Emily for her time.

II. School climate and student survey results

- Council members discussed survey data and its implications for families.
- 70% of students in grades 3-5 feel a strong sense of belonging at school, with 55% feeling completely or quite a bit belonging.
- 34% of students find school content uninteresting, and 60% cannot connect it to their daily lives, suggesting areas for improvement in making content more engaging and relevant.
- Highlighted 50% of students feel respected by their peers, while the other half are unsure.
- Teachers and staff will discuss the data with students to gather more information and improve well-being in school.
- Teachers feel overwhelmed/exhausted but maintain positive relationships with students.
- Teachers feel overworked and overwhelmed due to high expectations from families and district curriculum changes.
- Teachers express frustration with limited minutes and lack of flexibility in the school day.
- Teachers want more transitional time, with no district-wide decision on how to use an additional 30 minutes.
- Teachers feeling burnt out, with some considering switching careers.
- Navigating social skills and emotional needs of students is draining, with teachers acting as mental health care providers.
- Teacher burnout and family support.
- Parents and teachers discuss managing emotions and trauma in a school community.
- Parents and caregivers struggle with stress and emotional regulation due to the pandemic.
- Discussed disaggregating data by demographic groups to support teachers and students.

Action Items

- Begin teacher training on the new ELA curriculum on May PD days and in early June.
- Finalize Cambridge Public Schools ELA curriculum scope and sequences for next school year by March-August.
- Share meeting presentation slides and full survey data with families by posting on the school website.
- Disaggregate student survey data to analyze opportunity gaps.
- Meet with grade level teams on April 9th to unpack survey data and implications for next school year.
- Leverage teacher voice through focus groups to better understand sources of stress and exhaustion and identify potential solutions.
- Share examples of new school schedules under development with the School Council before the end of the school year.
- Add transitional time into the school day schedule for next year to address teacher feedback.
- Consider additional staff next school year to provide more support for teachers.