

Graham and Parks School

Cambridge Public Schools JK-5

School Council

May 29th, 2025

5:45 pm – 7:00 pm

UNAPPROVED DRAFT MINUTES

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

Members Present at Roll Call:

Administrative Representatives

Kathleen Smith - Principal, Co-Chair
Lauren Morse - Family Liaison (virtual)
Jodi Rich - Community Representative

Teacher Representatives:

Inbal Alon (virtual)
Karima Cherguaoui
Debra Gadsden-Holiday
Mason Gloudemans - Technology Support
Talía Greenberg

Parent Representatives:

Nasrin Belali
Lilly Havstad
Mary Hermann - Timekeeper
Gwen Savych
Christian Henry - Secretary
Arjun Jaikumar - Co-Chair
Guy Rosenzweig

Not in attendance at Roll Call:

none

1. Meeting Convened | 5:46 pm

Co-Chair Arjun Jaikumar announced that the meeting would be recorded at the request of a member of the public.

Roll call was held, the results of which are listed above. A quorum of the Graham and Parks School Council being present, the Co-Chairs proceeded with the meeting.

2. Prior Meeting Minutes Approval | 5:49 pm

A motion to approve the minutes of the May 1, 2025 School Council meeting was made by Talia Greenberg, and was seconded by Gwen Savych. The motion was approved by acclamation after review and discussion, without objection.

3. School Administration Report | 5:54 pm

a. Family Engagement updates

Family Liaison Lauren Morse shared that the school culture survey has attracted 190 survey responses, about half submitted by paper.

The Clothing Swap event held on the school playground on Friday May 16th was well attended and supported by Friends of Graham & Parks.

A Book Swap is scheduled for June 9th and 10th.

The Art Show is open to families to see student artwork Thursday June 5th, from 3:30pm-6:30pm.

The Food Market seeks volunteers on Thursday June 5th starting around noon.

Thank you to all families for showing up in many different ways to support the school!

Karima Cherguaoui shared that she planned to distribute books to her ML students. Kathleen Smith shared that summer is a time to reinforce learning skills, and there are sketchbook journals and resources being provided directly to families to help with scaffolding student writing and developing their mathematics identity.

b. Staffing and Professional Development Updates | 5:59 pm

Kathleen Smith reported on hiring committees in progress for the permanent Assistant Principal position, a Grade 1 opening (with demonstration lessons planned), and a Grade 3 opening. Opportunities for community members to join interview committees will continue to be shared.

Professional learning sessions were held at the school May 28th within departments. Staff shared:

- The multilingual learner education department focused on monitoring student progress
 - Talia Greenberg mentioned a recent focus in the multilingual learner department on progress monitoring to make sure students are growing throughout the year. They also focused on end-of-year compliance and paperwork activities to document student progress.
- ELA department reflected on curriculum feedback and plans for adapting curriculum next year.
 - Mason Gloudemans noted the district literacy leader Emily Bryan's presence and the value of her expressions of gratitude and giving grace around the implementation of new curricula.

A full day of professional learning for all teachers is planned for the day after school ends to:

- reflect on school improvement goals and learning plan to draft next year's goals.
- Share 'learning walk' protocol, which was developed with staff on Instructional Leadership Team (ILT)

c. Council Member reflections on the School Administration Report | 6:06 pm

Lilly Havstad registered concern about staff turnover, noting two first-grade and one third-grade teacher replacements, emphasizing the disruptive impact on students and the need for continued focus on school climate and culture for staff retention.

Guy Rosenzweig asked about the impact of the closing of the Kennedy-Longfellow School (KLo) on Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) programs. Kathleen Smith explained that the situation is in flux. Students from Kennedy-Longfellow were given the option to follow their cohort. The Tobin School will open K-2 SEI classrooms, and Graham and Parks will be the sole SEI strand for grades 3, 4, and 5, with only four students transferring to G&P. Two additional students opted to join G&P through a special lottery.

Gwen Savych thanked the staff for the Principal's Coffee events throughout the year, highlighting the valuable information shared with families, including about summer learning. She suggested wider dissemination of this kind of information.

4. G&P Vision and Community Task Force Update | 6:10pm

Task force member and G&P parent Maia McAleavey provided an update. The task force has met 4 times with the goal to strengthen the school community by building a shared vision for Graham and Parks and its students. The vision aims to integrate the school's robust history with its present state, while guiding its future.

Discussions largely focused on academics, specifically project-based learning (PBL), acknowledging its strengths (engaged, interdisciplinary, joyful, collaborative learning) and weaknesses (potential overemphasis on final product, sometimes overlooking literacy and math foundations).

The task force is diverse, comprising teachers, staff, parents, and district representatives, which is fostering a cohesive experience. The group is still building consensus and hopes to share something concrete with families and staff by the end of the school year, potentially leading to pilot initiatives next year.

Task force member Christian Henry praised the group's commitment to asking the right questions, particularly focusing on student feelings, knowledge, and actions in the context of developing the portrait of a learner. He affirmed staff commitment to consistently identifying students needing support as a pillar to include in the school's vision.

Kathleen Smith confirmed that staff are committed to simplifying the process of developing a vision and moving forward efficiently once consensus is reached.

A question was raised by Lilly Havstad regarding whether the task force would acknowledge or address past struggles and hard feelings within the school community, such as those related to a spring 2023 parent-initiated petition effort asking for a more in-depth conversation about the role of project-based learning in the school's mission. Maia McAleavey responded that the task force has been discussing these difficult topics and expressed optimism about the process and the opportunity to engage the community effectively.

Talia Greenberg suggested exploring the International Baccalaureate program's emphasis not just on Knowledge Skills, and Concepts, but also Attitudes and Actions as a model to draw from, possibly integrating it with the CARES values. Maia

McAleavey noted the school's vibrant history of social justice and community-engaged projects. Thanks were offered to the task force members for their work.

5. Subcommittees Update | 6:21 pm

a. Family & Community Engagement Subcommittee

Gwen Savitch reported that the subcommittee most recently met with three members present (Robin Harris, Nasrin Belali, and Gwen Savych), though other members had contributed thoughts in writing in advance. The primary focus was gathering the current written homework policies and perceptions of homework from the community with the goal of developing a clear, accessible, and comprehensive homework policy for all families, aiming for consistency, transparency, and easy understanding of homework expectations by staff and caregivers across all grade levels. A staff survey was conducted, informing the decision to provide more transparency into existing policies, including the Graham & Parks homework policy and the district's homework definition.

The output planned is a one-page summary outlining expectations and guidelines for each grade level, to be shared at the fall open house, in weekly packets, and posted on the school website. Suggestions for G&P administration included reviewing the policy at the start of the year, providing professional development touchpoints, and reinforcing accountability.

Jodi Rich raised the perspective of out-of-school time programs, where many children complete homework, and the need for programs all over the city - and with different support structures for homework - to be able to access the homework expectations and information (which are not available to the program administrators via ParentSquare). Jodi expressed the value of developing the skills around independent task completion. Nasrin Belali emphasized homework as an opportunity for families to connect with their children.

Discussion ensued about continuing subcommittee meetings over the summer, acknowledging that it is a voluntary commitment by staff and caregiver representatives, and that all activity regarding business before the subcommittees must adhere to Open Meeting Law requirements.

Talia Greenberg suggested clarifying the goal/objective of homework (e.g., fostering independence vs. potential inequity based on different levels of support at home), considering the needs of Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) students given that they frequently enter the school or program at different points of the year, and incorporating access to computer-based programs like iReady and others, including Chromebook access and other policies that support learning outside of school-time.

Debra Gadsden-Holiday expressed appreciation for the focus on homework, noting that the last time these policies were revised, that educational best practices were in a different place, and that finalizing policy should involve

staff input for calibration across grades. Others agreed that family input is important, but that staff and administration should drive the expectation setting and sharing.

Kathleen Smith noted that requests for much more homework tend to come from enrolled families of color and SEI program families, where generally requests for less homework are more often likely to be requested from general education families. The Faculty Advisory Council (FAC) will be rewriting the staff handbook this summer, which contains the homework policy, and the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) could gather feedback from grade level teams.

Karima Cherguaoui inquired and Nasrin Belali clarified that what has been shared so far is only a collection of existing policies; not any aspect presented so far is a proposed revision. Drafting a new comprehensive document would be the responsibility of the staff teams. Mason Gloudemans expressed being hopeful and appreciative for the possibility of alignment between staff, the district, and parents to establish a more consistent plan based on clarity on the purpose of homework, consideration of family needs, and educational objectives.

b. Budget Subcommittee | 6:38 pm

Lilly Havstad presented a draft timeline for the process of developing future discretionary budgets and School Improvement Plan budgets that would coordinate the input from the Principal, staff, and the School Council in its role as an advisory body.

Lilly Havstad indicated that a survey of staff from the Cambridge Education Association (CEA) regarding professional learning opportunities was in preparation, evolving from conversations between the CEA and members of the budget subcommittee. Kathleen Smith expressed that the development of any staff surveys should be done in close collaboration with school administration.

The secretary of the meeting inquired about when the minutes from the subcommittee's meetings would be submitted. A commitment was established with the sub-committee chairs to submit minutes before further sub-committee meetings would be held, and before the end of the school year in any case.

The timeline for the creation of a Professional Development (PD) calendar was raised, and Kathleen Smith explained that the district-level PD calendar, which impacts school planning, was not yet finalized. Lilly Havstad articulated the ultimate hope for the budgeting timeline: to facilitate better communication between teams to inform the council's advisory role on budget priorities in relation to school improvement goals.

Nasrin Belali expressed that focusing on detailed budget discussions would not necessarily be understandable to all members of the community. Nasrin advocated for making the budgeting process discussions accessible for the wider audience of parents and staff without financial expertise. Nasrin expressed viewing her role as a council member not as responsible for advising the principal on the budget, but to ensure that the educational outcomes most directly related to the learning of students, and her experience as a mother and focus on her family and the wider community, are prioritized in the Council discussions.

Gwen Savitch asked for clarification on what the goal of the budget sub-committee is. Gwen pointed out that the law specifies the council will "assist in the review" of the annual school budget, which is what the Council has done. But the language in the law, she continued, is not that the Council is to 'develop' the budget, nor to make changes to the budget, but only to advise and review the budgets. Gwen pointed out that developing or changing or adjusting the budget is the responsibility of the Principal, and that in a time when the Council is struggling to increase family involvement related to School Council it does make sense to focus on making the discussions more accessible.

Lilly Havstad responded by emphasizing the council's legal obligation as an elected body to review and understand school building budgets annually, especially concerning the approximately \$110,000 in discretionary funds, even as the Council does not have final decision making authority about the issues discussed by the Council. Lilly explained documentation submitted by the subcommittee is intended to address perceived concerns about equitable fund allocation across school staff. An exchange followed, after it was suggested that council members unwilling to undertake the work of examining the budget may not be well suited to continue their service as council members.

Kathleen Smith reminded members of the established Council norm to "speak your truth and be open to other perspectives", by highlighting the importance of finding a way to be open, and acknowledging that what members care about individually is not necessarily going to be what someone else cares about. Principal Smith emphasized the opportunity within the Council to bring families into conversation about school goals with staff at the table, to understand priorities and how we measure progress. Principal Smith also expressed the need to allow others to share what they care about, stay open and help people feel welcome. Principal Smith said that shutting down ideas that we don't agree with hinders forward progress, and stressed the need for a space where all voices feel heard, honored, and respected.

Jodi Rich questioned whether subcommittees were meeting their intended purpose: to reduce discussion time in main council meetings. Talia Greenberg acknowledged the value of the budget committee's work, particularly regarding discretionary funds, but reiterated concerns about the

style of interaction demonstrated. Guy Rosenzweig reiterated that budget review is a mandatory part of the school council's job description, not an optional topic.

Nasrin Belali reiterated her point that the subcommittee work is appreciated, and that the information presented should be understandable for all members of our community and not create friction or pressure within the community. Mason Gloudemans and another member echoed Nasrin's point about the importance of making all discussions accessible and meaningful for everyone, bringing clarity to encourage participation and engagement.

6. Community Feedback | 7:10 pm

A parent shared feedback about the impact on his family when family breakfast events are scheduled concurrently, preventing parent and sibling full attendance.

A parent raised their concerns about how the School Council elections were run several years ago. She expressed feeling unable to directly engage with council members as a constituent except in the council meetings because she feels as if those particular members don't represent her due to her perceived deficiencies in past election processes.

7. Meeting Adjourned | 7:17 pm

A motion to close was made by Mary Hermann and seconded by Debra Gadsden-Holiday. The motion was approved by acclamation without objection.