

DRAFT MINUTES

Graham and Parks SCHOOL COUNCIL

School Council Meeting: Thursday, December 12, 2025 5:45 PM, Graham & Parks School, 44 Linnaean Street, Cambridge, MA (Library and Zoom)

School Council Members Present: Kathleen Smith, Christian Henry, Lauren Morse, Aboma Dirbaba, Jodi Rich, Debra Gadsden-Holiday, Inbal Alon, Mason Gloudemans, Talia Greenberg, Gwen Savych, Lilly Havstad, Arjun Jaikumar, Nasrin Belali (online)

School Council Members Absent: Mary Hermann, Guy Rosenzweig

Also Present: Robin Harris (technology support), Candace Bass

Kathleen Smith and Christian Henry chaired.
Lilly Havstad served as secretary.
Debra Gadsden-Holiday served as time keeper.

A quorum of the G&P School Council being present, the co-chair Christian called the meeting to order at 5:50pm and read the call of the meeting.

The meeting proceeded with a roll call vote: Kathleen Smith, Christian Henry, Lauren Morse, Aboma Dirbaba, Jodi Rich, Debra Gadsden-Holiday, Inbal Alon, Mason Gloudemans, Gwen Savych, Lilly Havstad, Arjun Jaikumar

*Talia absent for vote, arrived around 5:55pm.

Co-chair announced the meeting will be recorded.
Council approved minutes from October 24 School Council Meeting - Arjun motions; Lilly seconds; all agreed.

2. Intros/Norms/Feedback on Last Meeting

Feedback from last meeting indicates desire for continued efforts to balance dialogue with public and maintaining meeting norm of equity of voice. Today's agenda structure attempts to address that feedback. Principal Smith welcomed more follow up/feedback from attendees on this issue so that the Council can continue to improve.

Paused for technical difficulties.

3. 2024-25 Discretionary Budget Presentation and Discussion

- Review of district/school budget

- Review of tier 1, 2, and 3 school staffing applied district-wide
- Examples of types of spending we can allocate at school level with discretionary funds. presented “FY 2025 Adopted Budget” and SIP budget

Noticing and Wonderings (Council Members):

- Cultural/linguistic backgrounds of teacher and para assignments to classrooms, particularly SEI classrooms
- Glad to see the PD spending
- Wondering about the small amount of money (\$500) for translation services
- Wonders about delineating district vs. school PD budgets
- Wondering how teams interact/who serves on them, glad to see stipends for those teams (for work outside of contractual hours)
- Wondering about instructional materials paid for by school budget vs. Friends—can we get more clarity on the process of asking for/allocating those funds
- How we can improve this process so that we as Council can be more involved in budget process throughout the year
- Wonder how we might look at ways to support new families coming into the school with school funds. How can we learn from other schools in the district to strengthen community-building work?
- A community member asks about 24 hr contract allocation (in teacher contracts) for family engagement—how are those hours being allocated?
- A community member responds to a reminder at start of meeting that we (Council) cannot respond to non agenda items to correct the record that council members can respond to non-agenda related items. Also asks if the council voted on the draft budget (for FY25) last year. (no response) Adds that Possip is going to spam mail—asks us to address that.
- Asks staff to say more about what is going on in Henry Turner trainings and why the OEIB (Office of Equity, Inclusion and Belonging) with its large staff and resources is not providing this kind of equity training to the school (which would be at no extra cost whereas Henry Turner is being paid a significant amount of our discretionary funds year over year—over \$20k this year alone). Asks if they are doing cultural humility work, for example
 - Answer - There was positive staff feedback re: professional development sessions with Henry Turner. They appreciate the consistency with him, building a relationship and trust with him, building on the work over time. Turner is also providing coaching to co-create trainings re: equity work at the school, leadership team. There are 18 schools in the district that OEIB is supporting and may not have the capacity to do this level of work at each school.
 - Two team members are participating in the Equity Academy with OEIB on a particular “problem of practice” —this year: how we transition Multilingual Learners from SEI to Gen Ed classrooms—what supports do students need? How can we better support them?

Some questions were addressed:

- Explained that grade level teams allocated \$2000 for enrichment from Friends of Graham & Parks.

- There are some district level departments that fund field trips (such as the Science department).
- There is also \$450/classroom annually (general budget) for classroom supplies
- Also \$450 of reimbursement funds per teacher from the district annually
- Answered a question about where interns are coming from. We targeted BC, Lesley, and others. Lesley ended up sending us two interns. Three had originally been planned. There is interest to expand the intern program moving forward for more classroom level staffing/support.
- Answered questions about how the various staff teams are formed and who is on them. Everyone who wants to be on a team is on a team. A Google Form is used for staff to express interest.
- A request for more thinking about how we can better coordinate and collaborate/communicate among teams, and how we can bring the Council into support/collaborate.
- Leadership team meets outside the school day to explain stipends
- Question about the school budget not meeting teacher/student needs for classroom snacks, cleaning supplies, tissues, etc. Asks, how can we improve the budgeting process so those needs can be met?
 - School supplies cleaning products and tissues

4. School Administration Report

Family Engagement:

- Free food markets are good opportunities for community engagement.
- Carrot card program (about 40 families at Graham & Parks will get Carrot Cards; there is more need than those 40 families) has replaced pre-pandemic practice of filling backpacks with food for families that depend on school meals for weekends.
- Community building Circles are coming back in January. Morning and evening sessions will be offered like last year.
- Looking forward to Math Night on January 16 and hot chocolate/cookies afterschool event in February
- New Families check-in Zoom meeting was last week. New families attended who just arrived to the country, meeting was in English and Haitian Creole.
- Family Engagement team: working to develop Language Leaders –how can we better welcome new families in their home languages, better support them; and how can we involve them more in planning school events to have events better reflect the diversity of the school?

Facilities updates - none.

Professional development (PD):

- Commitment to build in habits of mind from the Datawise conference last year but will be layered on later as staff/teachers are focused on implementing new curricula right now
- There was also a de-escalation training recently run by Cambridge Public Schools – helping faculty help kids who become dysregulated.

5. New Business: Potential Topics

- Co-Chair suggests we have an open process for determining new business instead of communicating over email. We don't have time to discuss all proposed topics on the agenda. Proposed we choose what to discuss by vote, but thought opening it up more broadly to hear what each individual member wants to discuss would be a good way forward.
- Suggestion that instead, we discuss ideas for future agendas in "new business" section of meetings.
- Some members indicated not wanting to stay later as the meeting was running over time. Others indicated that our meetings are too short/infrequent for us to cover everything.
- Council decided to work more on agenda setting and new business –ongoing areas for improvement as a council.
- Lilly motioned to create a budget subcommittee as recommended by parent-led research on chronic underspending of school discretionary budgets across the district, not just at Graham & Parks.
- Discussion on subcommittees
 - Member asked for clarification on what we are talking about when discussing subcommittees and their purpose.
 - Member expressed not wanting to commit to committee work.
 - Member clarifies that nobody on Council would be obligated to serve on a subcommittee. Added that any member of the community (not just council members) can participate in subcommittee work.
 - Member pointed to the recommendations re: subcommittees in the District School Council Handbook, and past practice of having subcommittees at Graham & Parks under past administrations (in accordance with the Steering Committee by-laws).
- Council moved to table Lilly's motion, and she agreed to bring more info/presentation to Jan. meeting so that council can discuss structures around subcommittees/how we want to do this work

6. Community Comment

A community member mentioned the K-Lo potential closure and asked how we can support them.

Another community member asks: what are we accomplishing at these meetings? The community member suggested that we set goals re: SIP and that we actively work to address issues of concern brought to the council. Asks us to think more about what it is that we're gaining from the school council that benefits the community, and particularly the students.

Arjun motions to close the meeting. Talia second. Meeting adjourned at 7:15.