

Cambridge Street Upper School
School Council Minutes
October 17, 2012, 7pm

Attendance: Manuel Fernandez, Vanusa Lima, David Albert, Larry Kolodney, Pat Servia, Susan Bellows, Ann Cason-Snow, Christen Sohn.

Agenda:

1) Introductions. The parent members of the school council are David Albert, Edwidge Hercule, and Larry Kolodney. The teacher members are Melanie Ahern, Vanusa Lima, and Sara Reese. Steven Swanger of the Cambridge Housing Authority has been appointed as a community member.

2) Discussion of role of school council. Per Massachusetts state law, school councils serve an advisory role to principals in setting educational goals for the school, assisting with formulating a school improvement plan, and reviewing the school discretionary budget. The exact role of this new body remains to be determined, and can be flexible to meet the needs of CSUS.

3) Confirm meeting dates. The next meeting of the CSUS School Council is scheduled for **Wednesday November 28th from 6:30pm to 8:00pm** in Room 212. Forthcoming meetings (exact start and end times to be determined) are scheduled for January 16, February 27, March 20, April 24, and May 15. A June meeting will be added if there is a perceived need and time allows.

4) Establishing meeting norms. Several norms for our meetings were proposed. The plan is to vote on a set of norms at the next meeting. The current proposed set include the following (partly adapted from norms of other councils):

- Listen to others, and watch your own air time.
- Assume every participant is coming with best intentions and a desire to help the school.
- Respect different perspectives.

- Respect confidentiality; avoid reference to teachers and students by name.
- Respect the facilitator, and stick to agenda items.
- Begin and end on time.

5) Election of officers. State law requires the principal to be one of the two co-chairs of the council. The other co-chair is to be selected by the council as a whole rather than appointed by the principal. At the first meeting, parents David Albert and Larry Kolodney agreed to share the responsibilities of parent co-chair and meeting facilitators.

The role of clerk remains unassigned at present; Assistant Principal Christen Sohn has volunteered to take notes, and David Albert to write them up to be approved by the principal and distributed to the school community.

6) Topics for future discussion. Manuel suggested that the council come up with some short-term discussion topics for November, and longer-term topics for the rest of the year. In the ensuing discussion, numerous topics were raised as general possibilities for upcoming meetings, in no particular order. It was agreed that the agenda for each meeting should make clear whether a topic is open for feedback from parents, for sharing information from the administrator, or for a collaborative attempt at making changes/adjustments.

The topics suggested, in a very general way, as some that have come up in the past or that might be of current interest, included:

- Curriculum (sharing of information)
- School Climate
- Parent/Community involvement
- School Policies
- Budget (legally mandated)

- Building plans, space issues
- World Language education
- Schedule: length of day; passing time; lunch/recess; block scheduling, etc.
- School and staff needs (materials, time: how can parents participate?)
- Staffing; hiring committees.
- School Improvement Plan? What are we going to do to see how this is working? What are the metrics for success?
- Data Wise process – inventory of data collection practices in the school
- Kids and parents who need a greater understanding of “new” practices
- Advisory/Developmental Designs
- Maximizing communications with families
- Advisory – how do we make advisory a facilitator of school-wide discussions and policies?
- Electives

The parent co-chairs plan to meet with Manuel prior to the next meeting to set the agenda from among the above items and any others that may arise.

7) Non-agenda items. There was a brief discussion of the role of Advisory in the school day, and a suggestion that Advisory be included as an upcoming topic for longer discussion. It was mentioned that the 6pm Principal Chat times appears to be better than morning times. A suggestion was made to vary the schedule of those meetings. The current plan is to have them monthly.

A question came up as to how the administration is monitoring how things are going. The principal is doing daily walk-throughs. Teachers already have a lot of daily observational data, as well as data from district assessments, to help guide curriculum and social development.

Student council or student government was raised as a topic that the administration would like to see developed and agree that the school needs. The start of school has delayed its creation, but the administration is in the process of talking with staff and deciding on the most effective means and ways to get a student council up and running. Questions were raised for future discussion about other ways to help students feel involved in the process of building the new school community.

School to parent communication: effective as soon as possible, Manuel plans to have all information that is given to students to take home in their backpacks also available on the school website, and emailed directly to parents via a one-way email mailing list. Copies will also be given to the PCO (parent/caregiver organization) for redistribution on the parent listerv.

Progress reports and Parent/teacher conferences: student progress reports will be sent home in sealed envelopes with students in late October. A robo-call will go out to all parents alerting them to look for these documents. At the same time, sign-ups for parent-teacher conferences will be made available in multiple ways: online signup form; email to a student's advisor; phone call to the CSUS office; or paper form delivered back to the student's advisor.

The meeting ended at 8pm. Next meeting is Wednesday Nov 28, 6:30 pm to 8 pm in Room 212.