

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

Roundtable Meeting

May 26, 2015

Called for 4:30 PM to 6:30 PM in the Dr. Henrietta S. Attles Meeting Room, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, 459 Broadway, Cambridge, for the purpose of a Roundtable Meeting of an update on the Upper Schools.

Members Present: Ms. Cronin, Mr. Fantini, Mr. Harding (~~ABSENT~~), Ms. Kelly, Ms. Nolan, Mr. Osborne, Mayor Maher

Mayor Maher in the Chair.

Also Present: Dr. Jeff Young, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Carolyn Turk, Deputy Superintendent
Dr. Victoria Greer, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services
Dr. Jessica Huizenga, Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment
Ms. Maryann MacDonald, Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education
Mr. James Maloney, Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Claire Spinner, Chief Financial Officer
Ms. Lori Likis, Chief Planning Officer
Ms. Deborah Sercombe, Principal, Amigos School
Mr. Manuel Fernandez, Head of Cambridge Street Upper School
Mr. Mirko Chardin, Head of Putnam Avenue Upper School
Mr. Ralph Watson, Head of Rindge Avenue Upper School
Mr. Jamel Adkins-Sharif, Head of Vassal Lane Upper School

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 4:35 PM.

Dr. Turk spoke of the goals for this roundtable meeting and the best way to frame it through a PowerPoint presentation (on file in the School Committee office) in order to share the data, successes and dilemmas of the upper schools and to engage in conversation. She noted that there could be a two hour roundtable for each individual upper school. If more information or data is requested, they would put together a follow-up packet for the Members.

Dr. Turk introduced Deborah Sercombe, Principal of the Amigos School, to begin the presentation on the Amigos Upper School.

Ms. Sercombe noted that Amigos has an upper school of 80 students and a school of 360 students. She discussed the following areas:

Amigos Academics

There is a strengthening and more vigorous implementation of the curriculum

The students write and develop upper school plays in Spanish: drama is done through social studies (medieval themes)

Teams collaborate at upper school level and across district on writing units

50% of 7th and 8th graders are in accelerated math pathway

There is a revised 6th – 8th grade scope and sequence for Spanish language and grammar instruction

They schedule year-long district departmental meeting to include all upper school staff from all departments

Amigos Social Emotional Learning

Developmental designs has been on-going: they do a circle of power and respect every morning with all students

Beginning work on PBIS

Integrating work on restorative justice

Have almost a zero percent suspension rate at Amigos school

Have an 8th grade end of year trip to NYC celebrating students' bilingualism and cultural competencies and increasing understanding of Latino immigration, heritage and culture

Amigos Electives/VPS

Amigos has a more scaled down version of electives than any other upper school

Increased percentage of students participating in Behind the Fourth Wall Production

Successful implementation of Drama, provided in Spanish and embedded in an integrated with Spanish Language Arts and Social Studies

Excellent and sustained support from VPA

Amigos Family Engagement

Increased parent teacher conferences per year

Amigos Upper School newsletter disseminated to families quarterly in English and Spanish

Parents are more aware of what is happening

Intense working happening in 5th grade to inform parents about middle school

Amigos Out of School Time

Upper school teachers feel very connected to this

Extra money for health teacher to work with upper school team

Collaboration with wider OST network

Cambridge School volunteers learning center once a week – homework center

All volunteers are bilingual and work with high needs students – very targeted

Dr. Turk introduced Manuel Fernandez, Head of the Cambridge Street Upper School (CSUS), to give the presentation on the Cambridge Street Upper School. Mr. Fernandez discussed the following areas.

CSUS Academics

Improvement in ELA and mathematics

Seeing steady growth - much of this work is challenging in getting the students to come to school and stay in class

They are transparent with youngsters – creation and implementation of power standards across all grade levels and with the specialists team to instill common language and understandings to support academic achievement.

The 8th grade uses power standards to shape portfolio work for graduating 8th graders. Every graduating 8th grader creates and presents a portfolio to a panel of school and larger community members.

All teachers participate in a weekly instructional practices seminar focused on improving instructional moves

Approximately 60% of the students are low income – cultural proficiency is important

Many children arrive not speaking English their first day of school; we don't know them but need to learn to know them

Had professional development for 6 of CSUS staff members to be trained as cultural proficiency administrators

CSUS Social and Emotional Learning

Every child has a teacher or an adult that he or she feels comfortable sharing with

Hired an additional counselor for total of two counselors to serve increasing socio-emotional needs

Established a Scholar Support Center (SSC) staffed with two Scholar Support Liaisons who support scholars who have been referred from class for disciplinary issues. The SSC operates under a restorative practice model.

CSUS sends at least 25 students every year to the Harvard University Health Project Conference in June

CSUS Electives/VPA

CSUS has a strong arts program including a jazz ensemble, marching band, concert band, orchestra, string ensemble, choral group and visual art exhibits and a winter play

CSUS marching band participated in the Memorial Day parade in Cambridge

Students participated in the Eastern Junior District Music Festival audition held this past January

CSUS Family Engagement

It's difficult to get the type of family involvement CSUS needs

CSUS has a parent caregiver organization and a school site council

Take Home Tuesday is the weekly school newsletters from the Head of School

Last year brought in caregivers and staff to have community dialogue about race, culture, diversity and their child

Try to outreach to parents and move beyond the school walls to engage parents where they are

CSUS Out of School Time

Great sports program; CSUS holds the most trophies of any other upper school

Most of students are engaged in something, but not all school-based

Dr. Turk introduced Ralph Watson, Head of the Rindge Ave Upper School (RAUS), to give the presentation on the Rindge Ave. Upper School. Mr. Watson discussed the following areas.

RAUS Academics

Reflected on what's working and what's not – originally had a 6 day schedule which was confusing for parents and students. In second year, had a 5 day schedule which was fine tuned and got positive feedback.

More teachers willing to take on leadership role

Looked over data and created a very focused professional development plan for the staff

Teachers were good with writing learning objectives

Focus this year was on formative assessment; how do you know at the end of class or unit that the objective was met and what to do if it wasn't met

Ending year preparing for teachers to do peer observation next September

Concentrating on feedback of students

Students showed improvement who were part of intervention program

RAUS Social and Emotional Learning

Do a weekly meeting of support staff

Student Leadership Team meets weekly to create programs and opportunities for other students in the school

RAUS Electives/VPA

Students were required to take either band, chorus or strings prior to the opening of the upper schools. Some students were not interested in music and now had the chance to take other electives such as basketball or skateboarding so the numbers in performing arts dropped which was a concern. The performing arts groups are now part of the music class.

RAUS Family Engagement

Using school improvement funds, the school clerk, Principal and the City's Family Engagement contact every family to do a quick check in on how they felt things were going with the school. If a conflict was reported, the principal immediately followed up.

Principal attended training on educating boys of color with Ron Walker

Offering appointments for incoming 6th graders and their families through July with the Principal and 6th grade teacher

RAUS Out of school time

Percentage of students who took part in a school based club or other OST activity throughout the city has risen

RAUS is involved in the Netpals program which connects 7th grade students with different companies and mentors through email correspondence, lunches and science projects

Dr. Turk introduced Mirko Chardin, Head of the Putnam Ave. Upper School (PAUS), to give the presentation on the Putnam Ave. Upper School. Mr. Chardin discussed the following areas.

Mr. Chardin noted their core values include passion, pride and ownership. He stated that even though PAUS is the only upper school identified as a level 3 school, they have done a great deal of work over the course of this school year and are a wonderful work in progress.

PAUS Academics

Insured that the data produced by their school authentically represents the potential of our students

They welcomed the DESE to come into leadership team meetings to work with them on unpacking data

They are focusing on ELA and Math

Utilize Galileo assessment system (ATI)

Develop a culture revolving around no shame, blame or judgment

Embraced RBT work and HET work

Work with staff on the mastery of objectives

Are objectives posted in classrooms actually lived; what does it look like to be a student who is engaged in class

PAUS Social Emotional Learning

Student voice is at the center of their learning community

We teach/we learn survey – authentic opportunity to survey students and teachers and cross reference data between teachers and students

Have a Gay Straight Alliance

Developed drop-in student support centers

Had 2 counselors and counseling interns this year

Created anonymous support student drop box

Professional development on classroom discipline

Staff members attended training on educating boys of color with Ron Walker

PAUS Electives/VPA

Annually they have up to 9 elective offerings for students to choose from

Annual Talent Show

Arts Alive! Night in conjunction with Spring Concert

Provide specialists with a bi-weekly meeting

PAUS Family Engagement

Implemented a strategy – no such thing as over communicating

Academic event – needs to be a celebratory component, back to school night and community cookout

Active parent school council

Provide rolling conference – will create time if parent needs time to talk about their child

Monthly grade sheet updates

Take home Tuesdays/Thursdays

Mr. Harding joined the meeting (5:35 PM)

PAUS Out of school time

Annually have 15 plus sports and clubs

Proud of 4 year 21st Century DESE grant awarded to them in partnership with the Agenda for Children and East End House which extends OST for teachers to provide additional support and enrichment opportunities to kids who have been struggling

Dr. Turk introduced Jamel Adkins-Sharif, Head of the Vassal Lane Upper School (VLUS), to give the presentation on the Vassal Lane Upper School. Mr. Adkins-Sharif discussed the following areas.

VLUS Academics

They have worked around developing a shared vision and philosophy
Hired a consultant to help instructional leadership team and school cabinet to be more effective communicating between the two bodies
Launched with a community day in September
Asked series of questions of expectations of the school
Had conversations with staff and cabinet, drafted language of vision and mission
On June 11th 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m., there will be a community day 2.0 to unveil the VLUS Vision and Mission statement
Work to continue is to develop action plan on areas of focus, outcomes and day to day actions of the school
Established a disciplinary literacy learning team
Can we identify where a student did not comprehend the objective
Developed a Math data cycle and PLC
Difficult to expand the intervention program to the extent that it is needed in VLUS
Established a problem based learning opportunity for 7th grade science classes based on Google 20% to encourage innovation and inventiveness. Science Coach Marianne Dunne and Academic Challenge Manager Paula Feynman co-teach weekly class focused energy.
Collaborate with Cambridge Creativity Commons and 6th grade science teacher to use digital animation to demonstrate plate tectonics and other geological forces
Have ongoing relationships with various labs such as the BROAD institute; scientists volunteered in classes and gave presentations

VLUS Social and Emotional Learning

Student support team meetings with parents, school nurse, staff members and all the interested parties to find the best way to support the student
Interns from BU School of Social Work
Established Manhood Academy, a daily before school mentoring program focusing on developing relationships, organizing, goal setting, and problem solving which involves three male staff and 10 boys of color; sports involved as well
Implemented restorative practices
Established student council this year, mostly 7th graders
Have a student support staff worker, facilitates student council, and acts as a mentor, community service projects

VLUS Electives/VPA

Rock bands performing on June 11 at a local restaurant in Somerville
Mock trial visits to Moakley court house
Held annual Arts night to showcase all VPA; student art auctioned at fundraising gala
Drama students write, create and perform a play
Robotics with Tufts University
Ran week long Stem camp at workforce office in Jefferson Park

VLUS Family Engagement

Monthly parent meetings
Successful STEM night
Portfolio breakfasts
Friends of Vassal Lane raised over \$7,000 to support academic programs and help students finance school trips

VLUS Out of school time

Participated in Greater Boston Debate League
CSV learning center

Provided a one week STEM camp for students living in North Cambridge in collaboration with Tufts and CHA workforce
Homework help drop in for 8th grade
6th grade help before school
CitySprouts
Established Gay-Straight Alliance student group

Mr. Adkins-Sharif then read the following statement:

I would like to say a few words that diverts from the script, that I speak to the dilemmas that you have asked us to describe. I speak for myself while everything I mention has been discussed at length with my colleagues, these conclusions are mine. I start with the framing of this discussion, in my view it is insulting to be brought into a conversation in regards to improving the upper schools as if the newest members of the CPS family are the source of the districts ails. I find it incredulous that we are now informing the School Committee of what is going on in the upper schools in late May after months of partial information, misinformation, and outright falsehoods have been allowed to dominate the narrative of what and how we are doing. So my humble advice to the School Committee, as someone who has spent 25 years in K-8 urban education as a teacher/administrator, is the following. If you want to improve the upper schools, respect the expertise and experience of the principals who lead the buildings. I believe we were hired as experts as the ones who have actually been in the trenches and who actually understand the middle school mind and the ways middle school differ from K-8 structures. We need support, we need guidance at times, we need resources, and most importantly we need our voices to actually matter and not get lost in the noise of Harvard researchers, teachers skittish about change and loud and entitled parents who were never embracing the innovation agenda to begin with. Treat Heads and Principals as the knowledgeable professionals they are and not with platitudes but by your actions as School Committee and district leadership. We have said loud and clear what we need – upper school community liaisons, a commitment to math achievers for all learners on par with all the energy and resources put into accelerated math, and a real commitment to cultural proficiency, a restorative practice equal to the money and resources this district is willing to give consultants in package initiatives. If you want to improve your upper schools dismantle the informal structure that allows the same chorus of voices to dictate the way CPS operates. Mainly, stop talking; stop taking directions from a small group of entitled middle and upper class largely white parents. Informal structures, I mean the way that they are allowed to end run around principals and go straight to School Committee or district on any and all issues. The way they get you to react when they send a few fiery emails or demand disproportionate face time or hold secret meetings at home is to work against school leaders. In my experience and that of my colleagues, that isn't the way the most black and brown parents, immigrant parents or parents of low income typically engage with schools in the district which means they are largely invisible when the real decisions are being made informally yet they represent 60% of this school system. That is a problem. If you want to improve the upper schools, put sincere effort behind empowering this silent majority. Get out to meet them and hear what they think and have to say. If you really want improvement, make sure their voices matter when you choose new school leadership and a new superintendent. If this isn't mere election year antics and you are serious about improvement, start at the top, uplift the bottom and do more than simply react to the middle.

Dr. Turk and the Heads of the Upper Schools responded to the Members comments, questions and concerns:

- How much have you learned from each other
- If a teacher does something that really works, how does that teacher spread it across the district
- What other data do you use other than MCAS to measure student engagement
- What is happening comparatively and how do you analyze data
- Have questions on philosophy of disciplines
- Most interested in the culture of our schools
- Anytime is a good time to talk about how and what we are doing in the upper schools
- We should hear each upper schools vision and mission
- This is a missed opportunity to engage with 5 experienced and respected school leaders

- Would like to hear the story of how they got from day 1 to where they are today
- Question of keeping kids together as a community
- Open up conversation of what the relationship of the School Committee should be with the schools and what our policy should be to support them in the work that they do every day
- We are seeing dynamic changes
- Why are we in year 3 talking about vision and missions; this indicates that something wasn't done
- Hope this is the beginning of conversation for the School Committee to implement policy that will support schools to achieve
- How do we collaborate with each other; how do teachers collaborate with each other
- The fact that students come into their schools many grade levels behind is of concern
- Do we know how our students fare once they enter high school
- How is that 9th grade class now as opposed to how they were doing before the Innovative Agenda
- What is shared culture
- How do we harness our talents to really support our students
- Maybe we are focusing too much on the data instead of the challenges the schools are facing in reaching out to the families
- Should have had quarterly meetings from the beginning
- How do we ensure these kids are ready to do 6th grade work and high school work
- Should we have an alternative middle school as we do with the high school
- We need to take it to a policy level to be partners with the upper school
- Where should we spend our time, our resources our emotions
- We have to think about how strategically to move the district forward
- The promise of the IA was that parents, school leaders, community would change the game for students with equity and expectation that all kids can learn
- Talked about having robust school communities; we thought promise of IA would change this
- How do we prepare students for the 21st century and build deeper and stronger connections
- We need to understand the urgency of what the upper school heads ask for
- What is the way we can understand as a School Committee the needs of the upper schools; is it different that the regular budget process and school improvement plan
- Timing could have been any time; it was a scheduling issue; this should be an ongoing conversation
- The moment is now that we can make a difference and move forward

Mr. Adkins-Sharif indicated that this could be the beginning of a conversation and not a missed opportunity.

Mr. Fernandez spoke about the extreme need for family liaisons which they call community liaisons. The Upper School heads have pushed in every direction for this. At the most critical time in these students' lives, they struggle to reach out to engage families who are dealing with the real life issues of feeding their children, finding a living wage job, and taking care of elderly parents. When these families are engaged, things will turn around. When families are engaged, it makes a difference in achievement and success. These families will have a voice in the schools. Students who are struggling; who have social emotional issues; who don't come to school; who get suspended; who disrupt classes and who have families that don't come to anything, are the students who have families that are imperiled outside of school with all that society presents. Mr. Fernandez urged the Committee to please reconsider community liaisons in their schools. He indicated that if it requires them to put together a 20 page document; he would volunteer to co-author it. He noted that he needs a point person for this type of work and also spoke about his staff going above and beyond their regular job responsibilities to engage with students and families.

The Mayor thanked the heads of the upper schools for their work and the work they continue to do. He noted that for those who voted for the IA, there is ownership and responsibility that goes along with that

and that our visions were different in reality. He indicated that the issue of community liaisons seemed to be brushed over in the budget process and not brought up that the upper school heads were pushing for this. Their advocacy may not have spilled over to the Members. The Mayor spoke about his visit to the Fletcher/Maynard Academy that morning and the concern of one young boy who wanted to help his mother find a job. The Mayor stated that we are all trying to do the same thing and hoped that this is the beginning of a dialogue.

The Superintendent suggested that the upper school heads come back in early fall for an update.

Adjourned (7:05 PM)

Judith T. Martin
Executive Secretary to the School Committee

Back-up Documents (copy on file in the School Committee office)

Upper School Roundtable PowerPoint – 2 1/2 Years & Growing (May 26, 2015)