

**Cambridge Public Schools
Upper School “World Café” Feedback**

***A Structured Conversation with CPS Upper School Families
About the Upper School Program***

“What is Working Well? How Can We Improve?”

In the Areas of:

*Core Academic Curriculum
Special Area Subjects and Electives
School Community/Climate/Family Engagement
Schedule and Communicating Student Progress
Out-of-School Time*

Includes Notes Taken By the Evening’s Table Host Facilitators (9)
And Individual Comments on Feedback Forms

Approximately 100 Participants
Representing All Upper School Campuses
and the Amigos Upper School

May 6, 2013

Some Common Themes Voiced by Participants at World Café Tables

Please read Table Facilitator Notes for Complete Information

What is working well?	How can we improve?
<i>Core Academic Curriculum</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers dedicated and working hard, caring about students • Engaging teacher teams • Positive comments about science, math, ELA, social studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns about rigor: ELA (reading and writing: amount, type/classics, rigor); math (8th grade algebra); social studies (research skills, absence of Facing History and Ourselves); science • Academic challenge ineffective and falling short of expectations • Teacher communication about student progress • Parents not seeing graded work • Report cards vague, not informative • Homework: not enough; inconsistent across subjects, classrooms, schools, district; policy on returning it • Lack of projects
<i>Special Area Subjects and Electives</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art • Music • Drama and performing arts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication about electives offerings and student progress • Process for student sign-up unclear • Concerns about pulling students from core classes for specialized music classes • World language: concerns about instruction, rigor, preparation for CRLS • Academic challenge: definition unclear; concerns about planning and staffing to make this period effective
<i>School Community/Climate/Family Engagement</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming school communities • Feeder schools came together nicely • Musical performances and student showcases cited as good community builders • School communication, at various schools • Increased cohort size. More kids=more friends • Mentions of lack of bullying • Advisory: beneficial social curriculum, building bonds with teachers/students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents seeking an active role; unclear how to be proactively engaged or effect change • Family engagement challenging with break from 5th to upper schools and students not as eager for parent engagement • Clearer communications about events and school processes • More information/communication about electives and afterschool • Robocalls: information helpful but too many calls; not useful for non-English speaking families • Parent attendance/engagement varies by demographic group • Advisory: parents not aware of curriculum; lack of consistency school to school, advisor to advisor

<i>Schedule and Communicating Student Progress</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication in various schools • Many teachers responsive to email • Teacher conferences • Schedule: students keeping track; seems smooth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule: 6 day schedule confusing • Report cards: not informative; don't show improvement; standard comments don't provide specific information; grades confusing to some parents • Academic challenge: time period too short to be helpful • Progress reports: more standardized (less informative), come late, not enough time between them • School day: too short for some, others don't want it longer • Consider lengthening time of blocks • Some interest in more recess, lunch time • School directories/contact books: improve process, complete earlier • Improve conferences: more time
<i>Out-of-School Time</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain individual clubs, at some schools • Opportunities to meet students from other schools • Before school activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication: updates about attendance and cancellations; more information about what's available; online communication • Offerings: more, greater variety (academic, industrial arts, sports), improve access and equity across schools • Tap into OST professionals across city • Offer cross-campus activities and ability to sign up at other campuses

Core Academic Curriculum

What is working well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7th grade teachers are communicating with daughter's best interests in mind; lots of email back and forth; this is positive; parent is impressed • RAUS – science is working well (7th grade); exciting science project • Science is working well at PAUS • Have heard from principals and club communication • Teachers are working extremely hard (PAUS); teachers are working late • Teachers are really dedicated; doing their best • Teachers are very accessible • My son loves math and he didn't before (6th grade) • Science is much stronger than it was before (7th grade) • My son still loves math (8th grade) • 6th grade – two math teachers in the class; was really important for my son; it would be great if that could continue in other grades • 6th grade – daughter likes ELA; good attention to writing • 8th grade writing – RAUS – required lots of iterations – this was positive for students; learned that writing was an iterative process • Social studies class did a great project about Cambridge (6th) • Good variety of projects in social studies, including creative projects (6th – VLUS) • Appreciation of some project choice in 6th grade • Teachers are concerned about the students, but they are trying to teach three different constituencies (below grade level, at grade level, above grade level), which is hard to accomplish • ELA and social studies are working well at VLUS • Science program in 6th grade is working well; so are math teachers at 6th • 6th and 8th grade math teachers are good about sending tests home to be signed; this would be good for all subjects • Two math teachers in 6th grade is great; it would be great if they could have two math 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One person's son feels like he is not getting clear communication from teachers; he doesn't go to advisory in the morning but he is following up with teachers; gets conflicting reports about which projects are happening (8th grade); web information is different from verbal information • Staff is inconsistent in their communication • Parents not invited to see science project • Have not heard from teacher • Curriculum – lack of writing and research in both social studies and English • Nothing longer than 5 paragraphs in ELA; curriculum is hand-cuffing teacher • Scaffolding was happening last year and isn't happening this year • Social studies curriculum is a problem, projects are at a low level --doing a wanted poster in SS right now • We have not seen a graded project all year • 6th grade – make posters in social studies • We don't see any of the kids' final projects (nothing comes home) • The kids are so bored – why are they reading during English class? Why are they reading out loud during English class? They should be responding or writing about the book. Students were reprimanded for reading ahead (7th grade) • Rigor was supposed to go up; rigor has gone down. Expectations have gone down. • Why no algebra in 8th grade? They need to be taught algebra in 8th grade. Special algebra classes are after school, which discriminates against kids who need to take the bus. • Why does a parent have to find an "N" grade on the report card; there is a need for earlier notification; progress reports are not enough. This parent wants paper in her hand (not computer). • Would like to see a personal comment on report cards about how to improve performance. • Special Education– should be reevaluated in terms of its effectiveness. • Academic Challenge is a waste of time don't see the value - might be useful for kids who

<p>teachers in 7th and 8th grade</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy with 6th grade science and the engagement; that is such a key year with STEM in general, especially for girls • ELA: the expectations are high; they are demanding work of students • Teaching teams are excellent • Good English teacher at 8th grade, but she needs support and permission to make private deals with kids about how they should be doing • The content is better than it used to be. Academically better. More science experiments done than used to be. • 7th grade; switched from ELL class to regular stream: really good that he is in regular classes now. Writing like a native speaker now: sentence construction is also good. • Committed teachers; larger cohort = more options and huge improvements in music and art == vast improvement • Compared to elementary: the learning topics and what is used to teach is interesting and engaging more so than before. Real benefit to teachers being more specialized. Daughter's interest in content jumped quite a lot. • NetPals in science and trips are great. • More diversity in kids/teachers is really a strength. • Content of classes is interesting • Teachers are interested in the well being of the students; they really care • Child really likes the teachers. • Caring teacher community and a real thoughtful group who do the best by the kids • At PAUC expectations are high and the work load at home is appropriate and challenging; kids are writing and get feedback on her work so they can rework their writing. Would like a bit more, sometimes. • My son is very engaged in the curriculum – comes home excited to share and I find it interesting. Improvement over K-5 • My son's teachers quickly got him as a learner and what he needed to succeed. When I've had questions, they've been responsive. • High level of commitment • Her kids have engaging teams and she can see that they are learning a lot 	<p>need extra time, but not for kids who need challenge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8th grade – differentiated learning isn't working in 8th grade algebra; some improvement due to club addition; sad to see lots of kids needing to learn algebra on their own; not a great model; with groups of 24, students can't learn on their own; different, haphazard approaches to teaching algebra • Student goes to high school for algebra, she would ride her bike to the high school; she couldn't have a van to the high school (3 students go to the high school); a lot of kids are sent to the library to work on their own • Last year in 8th grade, they did a good job teaching the algebra • Bad experience in 8th grade social studies --no level of challenge, not a lot of writing • The amount of required writing and reading in ELA and social studies has gone down -- only one book required in ELA (7th) • Very little recent history, very little information about recent events, little information about immigrants (in social studies) • Should empower kids to realize who is in their classroom • Parent want them prepared for 9th grade • Teacher does not teach the lesson in science class; can't control the classroom • Hasn't seen writing work done by daughter -- she was in ISP last year; no one was excluded- - has been a total disaster • Student misses book groups at Graham and Parks • Wish that there are consistent rubrics • Parent wants clear goals and objectives; this makes it hard for parent to push them • There should be more STEM education but nothing is changing; we want electives in engineering (8th) • We don't teach a quarter of the MCAS 8th grade science test content -- science department is sorely off base • Differentiated learning requires that there is someone at your level in the classroom -- concerns about lack of differentiation • Need some type of assessment at the end of 5th • Teachers in 5th grade should talk to teachers
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- Glad that there are middle schools. I wish there was more rigor. I don't believe in busy work for homework.
- Parents are more engaged when there is homework
- Homework that is good is really good.
- Packets at the beginning of the week for homework is really helpful so he can plan his week – creates regularity and an ability to plan.
- Communication between the teachers to gauge the amount of work each week.
- Math is consistent in homework and expectations.
- At VLUS teachers outline as a grade level what is going to be covered each week. Really helpful for students and families creates a useful tool between teacher and parent.
- "I'm kind of happy"
- Teachers work extremely hard – they are there everyday early and late! No lack of dedication at all
- Likes the middle school model – makes her independent

in 6th grade

- There needs to be time for kids to get individualized instruction in areas where they are behind; need to bring kids up to speed
- Parent ended up getting kids specific instruction; she thought that academic challenge would be about that
- Instruction in what they are not good at; challenge in what they are good at
- Documentation needed of the expectations in the core subjects
- Report cards were too vague; need to be more specific
- Advisory feedback on report cards was detailed; why weren't the academic subjects?
- In ELA and SS, 6th grade, they are covering the material, it's too regimented, with not too much room for discussion; dry and boring
- A lot of teachers stress MCAS; all students are learning is for MCAS
- Parent would like for kids to have structured discussions
- Would like portfolios
- Social Studies – some of the material is dry and old; need for creative projects (6th grade); didn't like timeline in Mesopotamia
- 6th grade social studies curriculum is dry; thinks that the textbook is elementary; a lot of kids have already studied this curriculum; they know everything that is being taught; curriculum could use some amping up. (Stock market game worked well for his son.)
- Curriculum has been much less interesting this year; no projects except for science fair project
- Students don't bring everything home; expectation is that everything is done at school
- Parents don't know what the feedback loop is like; don't see final drafts with feedback
- Parents feel in the dark about how to support work in the classroom
- Would like to see papers coming home for parent signature (this happens in math)
- Report cards are just drop down menus
- In ELA and Social Studies papers don't actually get printed; could parents have access to kids googledoc accounts? [One parent suggested that this already existed.]
- Child thought that he wasn't supposed to be

working on a paper at home

- Don't think that they are doing research skills
- They need to be taught how to learn; shouldn't be so much about content
- Researching in social studies; need to teach research skills
- Math – doesn't like the fact that they say go teach yourself algebra; it's a broken bandaid-- Need more teaching in the classroom -- parents are hiring tutors -- cheaper than private school...
- Math has been poor – no direct instruction (6th grade). Non-differentiated classroom with three kids who can move ahead; might as well put a spotlight on the three kids who can move ahead faster
- In 6th grade the emphasis should be on direct teaching
- Need for parent to advocate for kid to take the math tests (8th grade) -- equity approach is backfiring
- It's been a lot of work to be a parent this year.
- Parents need to work hard to ensure that students are going deeper
- Leverage the math approach (differentiation) in the humanities and the sciences; how to get kids to go deeper
- Need to give all people access. Discussion about equity issue with technology access. There are homework centers at the schools
- Why don't they have required reading in ELA?
- Homework is 30 minutes of reading every night, but no requirement to report out about what you are reading
- Son was writing weekly reading log last year
- How can you create this dialog with 90 students?
- How are we preparing kids to get to CLRS?
- No direction about reading; no suggestions-- no sense that they have read a novel. Not a hierarchy or goal or reading list; no goal for kids to rise to
- Librarians needed to direct kids; kids don't have library time
- There should be a real push toward more reading
- Concern about lack of preparation for CRLS
- This conversation should have happened earlier; my kid is not learning and students

are disengaged.

- More visits to the library are needed
- More opportunities for discussion in class in ELA and social studies
- More project-based learning is needed
- Same 22 kids in the four core classes; this didn't work for her daughter -- exposure to other bright kids is limited -- cut down on the socialization.
- Doesn't present the opportunity for kids to have knowledge or experience of benchmarks in the school; only certain lucky groups get this; is this a schedule issue or a core curriculum issue?
- Math – I understand that they are still working things out about math -- more communication about math would be great
- ELA separates writing and reading – seems strange to have a big unit on reading and then a big unit on writing.
- Would love to see ways for wide variety of reading levels to be creatively addressed, especially for kids who are good readers; so important that kids read for pleasure at least through 8th grade; this is so important for high school preparation
 - It's a challenge to do this with a wide variety of skill levels
 - Challenge level needs to be stepped up for all the kids
 - Skill level is varied
 - Give teachers more support in dealing with wide range of readers
- What am I going to get at the end of 8th grade? What should all students be able to do? Parent wants a skill set to allow her son to flourish, to get feedback, to improve. Parent feels like it's watered down. Socially her son is happy. She wants her son to be challenged. Wanted her son to be able to debate, to think through things, to be able to analyze. Where is that skill set? How do we engender accountability? You need to learn how to learn.
- Communication: math=what is going to be offered in preparing for high school? How does the algebra thing work? Thinks whatever the teacher does is good, but...
- Math – level of difficulty is lower than his original country. Around 5th or 6th grade. Not

	<p>sure if this is common? Teacher teaches well, but it's the curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic challenge is woefully short – at both schools the level of homework dropped dramatically. Not interesting or challenging. Challenge happens when kids are put at separate tables. Not being taught, really. • Undifferentiated classrooms hold back the kids. • Student advanced in social studies but behind in math. In both circumstances communication is a problem. No consistent reporting about her daughter's progress. She could do more, but no time for that because the teacher is working with other students. • Foreign language instruction is poor. Kids are bi-lingual already and not being challenged. Really ineffective – French and Spanish. So perplexed at a place like Cambridge that the instruction isn't better. • Not enough hours of language instruction. • Upset about the promise that the larger cohort would have more advantages; like enrichment in the foreign language opportunities/offerings. The language offerings dropped significantly from what existed before in another CPS school. • No clear pathway for Amigos kids at the high school. • Math – happy about communication from Amigos about what will happen in Freshman year. Why doesn't everyone else get the same type and content of communication about transition to high school. It's frustrating to not have same info. • Homework: Is there the same homework all over the city? Questions are often about the fact that the exercise refers to pages they don't have in the homework. Why? Is this the result of teachers being told to use certain homework? Kids are stuck because they don't have what they need to do the work. Reinforces the fear that the curriculum is standardized not standards based. • No rigor • Teachers are less able to deliver this year. Very different between 6 and 7 grade. Not sure what the reason is. Doesn't think it's the teacher. • Daughter crying because she had nothing to
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	<p>do in 8th grade.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special subjects: are treated by the kids with disrespect because they aren't integrated. Foreign language isn't validated – not as highly regarded as last year with the same teacher. • Curriculum content is not challenging in ELA. Doesn't seem to provide what we think is a good curriculum for middle school. • ELA – not required summer reading books with follow up the next year; why not for the whole class. • Feels like the district is setting low expectations for kids. • Need more homework: marked decrease in homework this year. Troubling because kids going to high school next year. • Thought the district was to be doing Facing History and Ourselves as core curriculum in Social Studies. Not seeing this, but were told this would be used as the model in all the schools • Question about efficacy of discreet subjects vs. integrating them. • Social studies, math and science teachers have no obligation to correct grammar on homework (told by head of school) • Who is giving feedback on student writing: what is the district obligation for all content teachers to do disciplinary literacy? EG: help with grammar, etc... • Liked that idea that all 8th graders would get to the high school with some academic consistency. Not happening. Baby steps forward, but big steps backwards on the individual school level. • Need an integrated core curriculum so that disciplinary literacy can happen. • One parent has never seen a paper come back graded by a teacher. Others have different experiences. • The point is to bring everybody up. But – basic things need to be done. A big homework day is 20 minutes! • Doesn't understand why any child is bored in school – how can that happen? Doesn't meet every kids' needs. • How were kids divided into groups? Seems to be some inequality is this, not enough balance.
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- Every kid in the advisory only got C,D,F's on report card. Kids staying in the same groupings. Is anything done to reassign them? (Could be a first year implementation issue)
- 8th grade math: what does the actual content cover? Question about how and when you get the information about the options for 8th grade and then what happens at CRLS?
- Why can't there be 2 math teachers in each grade so that we can really get all kids to algebra?
- Curriculum: certain parts of the curriculum that if we are going to have heterogeneous classes, we need more support in those classrooms.
- Not enough homework and not consistent amounts across the classes
- Concerned with how little her child read – more this year than last year.
- No consistency in reading.
- Science teacher isn't teaching.
- Taxpayer money is spent so where is the accountability.
- One teacher has never returned an assignment since September
- Needs to be some consistency across the district on returning/correcting homework.
- Academic challenge is not a good use of time. Thought it was supposed to be 'ACADEMIC CHALLENGE" but it's not happening. No communication to parents about what the expectation should be.
- Rather give those minutes (academic challenge minutes) to core academics!
- Hopes that math will be looked at closely.
- Would like more classics at middle school level
- Not reading books as a class
- Wonders if the message is you are not allowed to read classics anymore? Kid says teacher said they are not allowed.
- Shadow day at high school: mom still worried that they won't do the bridge to the high school. Back to 8th grade and the work is almost totally based on the textbook instead of similar to project/original source work at CRLS.
- Variable experiences.
- Is the academic preparedness going to be

there?

- Concerned about transition
- Executive functioning: this is one of the final opportunities to work on this at the middle school. Wish there were more study and executive functioning skills taught in the middle schools.
- What happened with the trimester and then the project?
- Teachers need to give feedback, they need to give assignments
- What happened to only 88 kids per grade? Why is VLUS getting another 50 kids per grade?
- Curriculum in ELA and Social Studies is pitched way too low – no sustained writing (nothing longer than 5 paragraphs all year). Needs more scaffolded reading and research
- Social Studies projects are not well defined or research based not challenging enough.
- Higher level of expectation for the students. Question about whether kids have enough choice or are they only assigned?
- Larger, extended projects are missing: synthesizing research with significant amount of writing. Less project based.
- Wants teachers to walk them through the research all the way.
- ELA is learning grammar and this is good.
- Kids read what they want to, but there is no introduction to literature. Teacher said she was breaking the rules by introducing “Of Mice and Men.”
- Teachers were told they couldn’t do Shakespeare in 8th grade because do it in 9th grade.
- Would like more variety and classics in reading
- Don’t see a variety of genres in 8th grade – this is disturbing
- Online math seems to be a waste of time; not learning any content. Not projects. IXL math?
- Math: algebra system that leads up to the test is very convoluted. Test is taken after school. Discriminates against kids who take buses, or have to be other places. Testing out = you are rewarded with a textbook to teach yourself algebra. Not a teacher issue – is a system issue.
- Don’t reward kids who push ahead with

isolation.

- IA cannot work without co-teaching!

Special Area Subjects and Electives: World Language, Visual and Performing Arts, Health, Technology

What is working well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art class works with core classes for interdisciplinary projects (CSUS) • Very engaged in curriculum with arts • Child loves teachers – will come home and talk about what’s being learned • Electives are teaching public speaking skills with performance arts electives • Beyond the Fourth Wall great bond for kids – but no support from school -- seemed separate – not well attended • Spanish better because they are really learning the language (RAUC – 7th and 8th) • Music program and visual arts and instrumental because the children are engaged, teacher is wonderful – from three schools’ perspectives – this is a good stepping stone for high school experience • Good variety of elective choices (RAUC) • Music at Vassal Lane and art are both going well. Kids are very engaged • Strings, woodwinds, bass are doing well because small group lessons • Music, band in general • At the RAUC hiring a qualified “speaking” French Teacher. • Music Programs are great at teaching how to play the instrument. • Putnam Ave great drama/Play’s • RAUC- Engaging performing arts • Scratch (computer) program is loved by many parents and students at the RAUC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more communication between schools about programs each offered, for more equity or sharing of best practices • Little communication around electives – what they are offering and what the child has been enrolled in (ie: What’s Scratch?) • No reports around how progress is and what is being taught in the electives, unlike core • Elective choices are heavy on performing arts – would like to see more science/engineering/industrial arts (all groups said this with emphasis) • Band is offered twice, but orchestra is offered only once in a 6 day cycle • Child wasn’t interested in elective choices that were offered • Specialists are not included when a conference or teacher contact is requested • Wondering what is being taught with technology all year – is it an elective? Is it part of curriculum? • World Language: doubt child will be prepared for high school level world lang. course. • Expectations for Spanish/French are not clear (Is it equivalent to one year of a high school course?) • Treating world language, or calling any class, an “arts” or a “special” class gives the class less respect and kids treat it as such • Music: demands that are being asked of the kids are not rigorous enough • It seems that three languages were at first offered and really there’s only two – confusion around it • Specialized music classes will pull kids from content classes (said in all groups) • 6th grade child wishes they could choose just one language instead of doing both for part of the year. Wants more in depth learning. Feels they’ve barely scratched the surface. Because of the half year, it ends up depending on the teacher – choose a language based on teacher preference.(many groups said this) • Language learning has been an issue for years because of poor instruction. Believe district

	<p>should begin language instruction earlier, classes are too infrequent in the schedule.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework in languages is not rigorous enough • Is the district hiring qualified teachers for language instruction in the upper schools? What is the certification process at the state level? • When children are learning an instrument, they shouldn't have to choose between instrument or chorus (8th grade) • The "good" electives will fill up fast • Student felt "stuck" in the elective – too large, not enough staff, not enough supplies • Behavioral problems are causing widespread punishment for all - not fair • Boredom is an issue throughout electives (cause of poor behavior) • Projects and work in general are not challenging enough • Need outside staff to help – electives could work well if better planned • 6 day schedule seems to create inequity because certain groups are behind other groups • Need Advanced placement for Instruments. Music needs to be more like math, with an entrance exam to understand the baseline of students. • Industrial arts is needed at the middle school level. If housing is an issue, form a partnership with the high school RSTA/exploratory programs. • Parents are confused with the use of technology—they do not see the where all the money that was spent on technology has gone. • Choosing electives based on their success this year • What is the process of choosing electives and how are students allowed to pick? • Major concern for electives was having student not be allowed to participate in their first choice. (perhaps offer the popular elective twice during the year) • Music needs to be more of a subject rather than an elective. Parents are concerned that if music is not a priority, student engagement will diminish. • Common theme for multiple parents ***No elementary languages offered. • A school newspaper is a good option for electives-while also allowing for students to
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	<p>communicate with families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are we offering Skateboarding as an elective?
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<p><i>ACADEMIC CHALLENGE:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once Algebra began for a small group it seemed to be better – don't know how it worked, but it seemed to be a good idea. • Mapping Ethiopia and other projects were useful. Multi-disciplinary projects were great Time was not during Academic Challenge time 	<p><i>ACADEMIC CHALLENGE:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not clear definition for families, students, teachers, etc. • Children aren't being challenged • Waste of a half hour • Isn't as great it was supposed to be • Child says let's take away Academic Challenge because teachers don't know what to do with it • Can't have writing excelled group and a writing group that needs help– it doesn't work because not enough staff. • Need more staffing • Not consistent between schools • Could work if there is more planning • Not getting what was promised or 'advertised'
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School Community/Climate/Family Engagement

What is working well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAUS – Morse, King, K-Lo came together – not a lot of parent engagement leading up to the beginning of school. Has been a reasonable level of parent involvement so far – really good about level of communication from the administration – both e-mail and back pack – great that the message is duplicated – sometimes one gets through and the other doesn’t • Communication from teachers also working well – he feels engaged with classroom • Friends of [Group] has been great – but not at all schools • Daughter is happy at school – many concerns that kids would be anxious, but hasn’t been an issue – she makes good friends, doing well in classes, teachers did a good job creating welcoming community • Very few instances of bullying, nipped in bud – surprised that there wasn’t more bullying • Feeder schools came together nicely inside the Upper Schools – good to have larger cohort (x4) • Arts programming – getting together for Winter Concert/Showcase – breathed huge sigh of relief that things were good • Music program very good community builder • Not much bullying in 7th, but heard about some in 8th grade • Meetings done at different times of day, very accommodating to single parents, working families, etc • Summer barbeque worked really well • Monthly “coffee” with principal – would be nice if more people came <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talent show was really nice – everyone was there • Musical performances (CSUS) • Dances were nice for climate and spirit week • Activities at beginning of the year to bring people together were very good • Robocalls are both good and bad – get lots of info but there are too many • Good for kids that teachers from their former elementary schools came with them to their upper schools • More kids = more friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSAG meeting with Karen Mapp was good but nothing was like “OK lets do this...” • Feel like it’s up to parents to jump in • Transition from pick up and drop off and talking to teachers every day to kids walking by themselves and not having that automatic connection • If there was a website for each team or class – with “what are we doing” and “here’s what the homework is” • Communication is good but want an active role • Discourages parents from e-mailing the teachers – e-mailed teacher and got a reply from the principal saying “Don’t e-mail the teachers” • Feels like parents aren’t welcome • Attitude needs to be that more family engagement of families transitioning from 5th grade to 6th • 6 day schedule caught everyone by surprise – not well communicated – brought unanticipated difficulties • Family engagement difficult with the break between the 5th and 6th – the 7th graders would be happy if parents never showed up • Parents experienced break between themselves and the system - at G&P, parents felt that they were estranged during implementation of IA and the bridge wasn’t built • Need school directories – how do you find volunteers for events, or get the word out about things when people can’t get in touch with each other – list serve only works for people who are already engaged • Memos are not clearly written – example “World Café” is jargon, people don’t know what it means – more info is better – also typos – more emphasis on graphics than on communication quality • Be clear with due dates and to whom the form should be returned – minimizes back and forth • After school stuff was very confusing – gave people’s names but not their role – • Make sure to give clear directions on web site

- Rindge Ave has really good communication – but if you’re a working parent you can’t go
- School-wide events have been engaging.
- The Arts are being showcased well, music, art, etc..
- Localized events planned by individual schools have been well attended.
- Weekly calls for notices to families have been helpful.
- The mix of large cohorts within the schools has been good as family connections have increased.
- Many more creative activities are available to students and parents alike.
- There is continuity, social engagement, and community bond that is developing.
- The events for students (dances, movie nights, talent shows, etc.) are essential for overall engagement.
- The electronic communication, instead of relying on paperwork that usually never reaches parents, has been well received.
- Portfolio night and Math night are solid examples of student work being showcased and families engaging.
- Opportunities are there for a diverse mix of parents to be involved in the school climate and culture.
- The schools feel welcoming and there seems to be cohesion throughout.
- In theory, it feels like parents have power and are valuable stakeholders.

Advisory

- The class size is conducive to open dialogues and personal connections with the teacher.
- It’s an integral component of the social curriculum.
- Very beneficial for students who are lacking in social skills.
- It should be promoted and followed by all throughout the system.
- This is great tool for teachers and students to get to know each other, which then transfers to content driven classes.
- It’s great that we have it and that it is interactive.
- Bonding happens and bullying issues are addressed in the safest environment.

about how to call students in absent and mundane procedures

- Make sure to update website – teacher went on maternity leave and the name wasn’t updated
- School council is more of an update meeting – less of a discussion – parents don’t feel that their input is being sought
- Not enough information about electives – 1st term really bad, 2nd didn’t even get the info, found out about what her son was taking 2 weeks after it started – parents felt they want to have a chance to influence what their kids take
- Confusion about electives vs after school “electives”
- Pull kids out of science, math, etc for music and parents didn’t know – they didn’t like the kids being pulled out without their knowledge
- Climate – 1st time in history of school concept of punishment and rewards was introduced – don’t need to give them incentive of a Hershey bar – they know they go to school to learn
- Punishment like detention gives school a whole different feel
- Assembly half way through to call on people who have done their homework and give them candy mortified her daughter who didn’t want to be pointed out as a “goody two shoes” in front of the whole student body – now she purposely doesn’t do all of her homework
- Reward system felt opaque and not fair (giving away Kindle’s, etc) – very mixed messages about why we’re here and what we’re doing
- A lot of families in Haitian community don’t have e-mail, they are shy to go to events because they don’t feel comfortable because they don’t speak English (she goes to events and knows people are missing) Need to do more outreach
- Too many robocalls – can’t listen anymore
- King Open was so huge and C-port and Fletcher Maynard were tiny, so the King Open really took over culture wise, not a good job of blending
- E-mail from school cobbled together from the kids so many people don’t get them and the

info is really important

- The directory is useless – need to have more people in them – some people were surprised that they got it and they weren't in it – need a complete list – paper should say "if you want to opt out" otherwise they should be in –
 - Two things – should have an opt out for the book and also for the school e-mail list
 - Robocall doesn't work for people who don't speak English – sometimes they are translated but not always
 - Lots of problems with community climate
 - Kids are doing better than parents with the school climate – parents go to meetings and hardly anyone is there – don't feel they're part of a community
 - Tough to go to meetings – 8 in the AM is good so teachers can be there, but hard for parents. Recognize that it's hard for teachers to come in the evening
 - Also an issue that kids don't want their parents to be involved anymore
 - When schools were K-8 all one family, now they are separated – it's not as warm a feeling
 - Some very unnerving things – need to send more home than a letter about it happening. Need more processing – also around the bombing – a lot of kids live on the street of the bombers – some parents disagreed with this last thing saying that the schools did process the bombing
 - A lot of behavior issues in the class that impeded learning – it's better – but there was collective punishment, which wasn't fair. Need to deal with behavior disruption more individually – hard to create community with so big a group – need to make smaller groups or it devolves into cliques
 - 80 kids in the school, but they only really interact with about 30
 - Teachers need better training in developmental design (like at Baldwin) (classroom management) and divide into small groups
-
- Not clear to parents how to affect change, and they feel like staff don't know either (parents are told to go to the school committee)
 - Cambridge is good at having events like this so parents feel like they've been heard, but

then nothing every happens – people need to take responsibility and following through and there should be accountability

- When one kid misbehaves the whole class is punished – need to stop collective punishment
- A very punitive feeling in some campuses – lots of rules and detention and meanness – speaking to kids disrespectfully – making them get off the grounds after school – overly punitive – not inclusive – not welcoming – it insults the kids
- Kids are surprised and dismayed at the disrespect other kids show to the teachers and staff
- Nothing communicated academically – don't know what kids are working on, what their homework is
- Conferences for 10 minutes with 4 teachers are pretty useless – individual teachers are helpful when you contact them “We're happy to meet if you want to, but do you think she really needs it? – That puts the parents in a position of being labeled as a “high needs parent” – should be better way to get feedback
- If there's only going to be one meeting – maybe it should be more toward the middle of the year when they actually know the children
- If teachers don't have time to have meetings, need to have a day when there's no school and we have parent meetings
- Meetings with principal they always just send you back to the teachers
- Feels like it's competitive between the heads – not collaborative
- Should have a list of “if you need help with this call this person and then the number”
- Kids need to have an anonymous way to report things like bullying, seeing kids smoke, etc
- Do kids know who the counselors are? Do they introduce themselves? Do they tell kids they can come talk to them or tell them something if they are concerned?
- “Guidance Counselor” need a better name
- Where did the rules come from? Are they from the head or from the district? If some are from head and some from district, how do

	<p>we know which is which?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• System of passes – when do you need one? Confusing for kids –• All schools should have a leader that monitors and enhances this theme (family liaisons).• Some parents feel they are on the periphery as others have more sway, some social intimidation is evident.• Events and activities feel rushed and thrown together with a lack of resources that would enable better attendance.• There is a lack of equity for families lacking in resources and time and putting parent volunteers in charge doesn't work.• It's difficult for parents to determine when they can be proactively involved in a school initiative without feeling like a burden.• Better signage and bulletin board placements would help parents maneuver through buildings.• Transportation issues (late buses, waiting for buses, students who walk) has been discouraging and contributes to lack of family cohesion within schools.• The Innovation Agenda tore some communities apart and the tight community bonds that were there have diminished.• Socioeconomic and ethnic/racial imbalances are evident in parent engagement and attendance.• The "World Cafe" moniker was misleading, some thought it was a celebration of international foods.• Lack of info from teachers; communication from individual classes instead of from schools.• The district wide directory that was to be constructed was flawed and confusing, some parents wanted to be involved and view the fact that it was never completed as a sign of overall incompetence.• More open transparency is needed (data sharing, benchmarks, achievement gap, etc) to improve parent engagement.• Timeline issues - deadlines pass, commitments are not fulfilled.• District flight; according to some parents many students are leaving and heading to private schools but that data is inaccessible.
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- Meetings for parents should start after 6pm or on Friday's to improve attendance.
- More school events that unify students and families, like dances/barbecues, should occur.
- Homework expectations should be accessible via the internet.
- Cultural connections are lacking, there should be more ethnic celebrations (International food night) and opportunities for cultural outreach.

Advisory

- The schools need to share a common vision and implementation of advisory.
- All advisors should be trained and follow some semblance of a curriculum throughout.
- Teachers need to be mentored/guided through an advisory curriculum as they implement it.
- Parents feel a disconnect with the curriculum that is covered in advisory.
- What topics are addressed? What is going on in this class?
- There is a sense that some schools and teachers are committed to this program while others are not.
- Students should have a voice in choosing advisory teachers they may connect with better.
- It's behavior driven instead of focusing on community building and valuable interactions.

Schedule & Communicating Student Progress

What is working well?	How can we improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report cards are helpful. Teachers are giving thoughtful feedback. • Open classroom evenings helpful • Teachers are open. They are honest in regards to how daughter is progressing, however would like the communication around how child is doing before progress reports come out. Expected that parents will have an idea about how their child is, but won't know until they get a progress note. At that time, not enough time to make up the work. Solution would be to have access to grades etc. that teachers are putting in via Internet. • Communication from front office is good and consistent. They don't over inundate with emails. • Schedule has worked out OK for child. Nice to fit all the things in, but a little too much and chaotic. School communication has been wonderful. • Rindge Ave has great communication • Whenever emailing to Putnam Ave and Rindge Ave always gets a response. Good information coming from Adm. Teachers are there early and there late for extra help <p>Schedule</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjustments were made and it works -- students remember which day it is • They didn't have as much choice as before, dramatic arts included • 7th grade going smoothly • It seems to be working on some level. • Students like the structure of the schedule, though it took awhile to get used to it • Varied classes, not always same class at the end of the day, teachers more energized • Student saying it's okay, not creating confusion, not hearing bad stuff, maintaining interest • Kids are keeping track • Late start is good – but worry about transition to early start at high school for 8th graders • Students don't seem to mind • Schedule fine • Cohorts getting along • Like the flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-day schedule is challenging. Felt that there is a reason HS got rid of 6th day schedule, so middle school should not have it either. They don't have same amount of time and consistency in core subjects. Electives have not been great. • The music program: parent wishes that child was not allowed to choose to participate in particular activity. Feels that they should have to play an instrument, however, doesn't like that kids have to miss some core subject classes to attend music; feels it sends mixed message about how important it is for them to be in class. • Another parent feels 6-day schedule is very confusing. • After school programs are too short per term. Wishes that sports were longer throughout the year, maybe half year. • Having automatic options in report cards is not a good thing. Every teacher uses the same three options. Not a lot of feedback specific to their child. A narrative would be better. • Can't go by a teacher's classroom to talk to the teacher and check-in. Wishes they could. • Academic challenge has been a waste of time. Feels like a study hall. Kids report that teachers don't know what to do with the time. • Want 5-day schedule- will benefit kids more. • Longer school day in middle school becomes more important to provide inclusive experiences with electives etc. • Grades are confusing. Doesn't understand what they are based on. Wants more comments. Just a letter grade is stressful. Progress report not specific to individual child. • Conferences are much better, where you meet with the whole team at once. • Day 3 and Day 6, kids hate that there are only 30 min long classes. Want more time for core classes so that they can do more. • Communication is not good between children and teachers • When he follows up one by one, gets conflicting reports from different teachers,

Communication and Student Progress

- Teachers responsive to email, some *very* responsive
- Teachers will email you, keep parents posted, accessible
- Staff open to emails and meeting with them
- Have the sense that they know the students
- Like team (teachers) conference
- Automative system informs
- School websites better
- Report cards and progress reports are fine
- School clerk working well with communication
- One teacher extremely responsive to us
- Team leader – system at Putnam is working well, should be more consistent
- Teachers are open to conferences.
- Some teachers send out biweekly messages, will call a parent to compliment.
- Teachers are responsive
- Conference system worked well at Vassal lane. You could sign up, 2 hour time slot, system worked
- Teachers very responsive to email
- Musical was a plus
- Teachers open when they are requested, not automatic times

dates are off. Child misses advisory due to being at the HS for math

- Communication around planning school events has been difficult
- 20 min class days for Academic Challenge not helpful. Kids feel rushed. No academics, not a challenge. Don't understand what it is.
- Cohorts stay together all day long, which goes against Innovation Agenda. There should be opportunities to mix between classes.
- Schedules took a long time to be set up.
- Communication between admin needs improvement
- For working parents it is hard to come in. Communication with teachers much better.
- Report cards not informative. Some teachers don't put anything down other than letter grade. Parent night, you could only meet with certain teachers for only 10 min-not helpful. No choice between what teachers they see.
- Communication with leadership poor at V.L. Frustrating. Feel like you're in a black hole. Wants to know who to call to get answers.
- Progress reports make no sense and are not helpful. There are standardized words that mean nothing.
- Progress was not specific to particular child.
- For people that don't speak English, they do not get information. Emails are in English and they don't understand, or they don't have email and they don't understand/know what is going on. Robo calls made in English and parents don't understand. Progress reports in English and people who don't speak English don't understand.
- Suggestion: collect information at the beginning of the year for preferred language for child and how best to communicate with parents.
- Provide a training for parents how to read progress report for parents that don't speak English. Robo calls should be made in other language.
- Parent teacher meeting: sign up on line, but it's hard to be done on line. Not everyone has a computer.
- 6 day rotating schedule is very difficult for children who have executive functioning issues. Makes kids hopelessly unorganized. Not knowing what to bring to school on

	<p>particular days</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress reports are too late. Parents should know what is going on before the mid term progress reports and report cards, so that parents know how to help child in the interim. Viewing grades on line at some schools is available but is confusing . If an assignment hasn't been graded yet it looks like child has an F. • Some homework assignments at Putman Ave are confusing • Make core subjects longer • Kids are confused about portfolio at Putnam/parents want to know why they have to have a portfolio done. Some parents don't have an understanding of portfolio. • Some schools have community service and others don't. • School day is FAR too short • No challenge in the schools for the kids. Kids are bored. • When parents call in to say that students are sick, in the morning they still get a call in the day to say child is out. This is frustrating. • Parents would prefer to not have 6 day cycle • Want more personalized comments on report cards • Used to have two conferences, but now only one. Wishes there were more throughout the year • Five minutes are too short for parent teacher meetings • Should make it clear that teachers are available for conferences at other times, not just conference time • Time between progress reports and report cards is not enough. • Other than progress reports and report card no communication. Nothing comes home for parents to know how the child is doing. Wants more communication • Want teachers to communicate if there is a problem. • Friday folders with weeks work that will then go home to parent would be helpful so that there is constant information going home and parents feel informed. • Numbers of transitions in the day makes kids lose a lot of time. Moving across the school makes them late. Running to classes so that
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- they are not late. Classes should be longer
- Longer day to provide a proper lunch time and recess time.
- Some parents against longer day because they feel that some kids can't take a longer day.
- Avid should exist in the middle schools.
- Communication should be happening more between teachers and parents of special needs students.

Schedule

- 5 day schedule will help with fluidness, with 6 day difficult to plan in advance,
- Anticipating holiday, you may miss more time, bringing someone in to teach electives and part time staff schedule difficult
- Academic Challenge block - get rid of it or make it more useful
- Lengthen the school day
- Have electives before and after school
- Longer classes will result in fewer transitions – too many transitions problematic
- Have fewer periods -- double blocks, you can combine them – makes for better transition to high school
- Longer school day
- Offering things after school or before school
- Academic challenge not utilized well – build into more core curriculum
- Core curriculum teachers overloaded – should not have to do academic challenge block, should be included in subject
- Move to 5 day schedule - 6 days take away flexibility, part time people
- Improve Academic challenge, and advisor
- Students and teachers would benefit from a longer block
- Increase time – give more down time—recess, lunch, don't get to see their friends (someone disagreed about needing this in upper school), will help with tight transitions.
- Not enough flexibility, 5 day would improve.
- It's not clear that what works best in one school will work for all schools
- Longer school day – group agreed
- A few said use it for longer lunch, recess, world language, or other options
- If homework was more consistent wouldn't need longer school day.

- Move to a 5 day schedule - Difficult to know what you are going to miss with 6 day, electives once in a cycle not worth it
- More time for lunch
- Work on civility, too rushed
- Get rid of academic challenge
- Student progress report insulting by picking a canned comment
- Revamp the progress report, think of ways to see the data teachers have on students
- Communicate expectations – need to be clearer - for parents *and* students
- More conferences, separate conferences.
- Progress report, a little standardized, not as good as elementary and high school.
- More conferences and more frequently
- Create a more welcoming environment - feel pushed away sometimes
- Have dialogue not when it's just bad news, provide more positive feedback
- Would like to have availability before school, parent coffees, teachers set aside one evening or morning
- Better communication from upper head
- Have more open culture - School not reaching out enough, sometimes feel a wall between teachers and community
- Encourage parents to be involved – we want students to be independent but also want to be involved, challenging to create communities
- Suggestion – use social media, schedule conference time via skype or facetime
- Directories weren't helpful –One parent called the process insulting, Suggestion - check off at beginning of year, should be able to add names
- Family liaison needed – hard to plan parent activities without this, things could be kept more positive, one person doing this would be more effective
- Report Cards system is problematic - Standards based doesn't allow for showing improvement, confusing, premade description not helpful, start with a subject – not behavior, canned comments not helpful
- Parents confused about when they can ask for a conference– other parents didn't ask, clearer accessibility would help,
- Some schools said only if your kids aren't

	<p>doing well – Have conferences for all.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Progress reports out of sync.• Don't penalize students by having them stay in for recess for not doing homework– still happening.• More conferences – not enough slots, didn't have in spring• More opportunities to meet with teachers• Improve an evening of portfolios - expected more• Better communication about the portfolio process• Establishing expectations – example one student had a big drop in math and parent didn't know until end of term, teachers need to let parents know,• Report cards – List of canned comments doesn't work, comments don't tell you anything• Working to potential is not reflected on report card. No one is asking if a student is working to their potential• Suggestion -to make better use of the advisory time, knowing the advisor would help.• Really capitalize on advisory time to find out more.
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Out-of-School Time

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
What is working well?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual clubs, including: Math Counts, Newspaper Club, Jazz Band before school at CSUS, Theater Tech at PAUS... • Beyond the Fourth Wall • Media and performing arts • Early morning extra help • Meeting other kids • Robocalls to parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual clubs, including: Creativity Commons, Media journalism at Media Arts Studio, Math Olympics • Beyond the Fourth Wall • OST programs beyond the schools • Menu of offerings • Single-term offering – allows for sampling • Teachers always willing to stay later, encourage students to stay late or come in early • Summer planning workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best thing about IA is OST offerings for MS youth • Club selection • Individual clubs/opportunities, including: CityStep, Science Club for Girls • Volunteer (i.e., non-CPS) club leaders committed, passionate • Socializing of students coming from different schools • Partnerships with outside organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual club: Theater Tech at PAUS – connection to CRLS Daughter loves getting to school early (not sure what is happening while she is there) • Start of late buses (albeit late) • Cool activities • Before school programming
How can we improve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication: inconsistent; need central process/structure; clarify what's available, how to access it; informal communication does not work in middle school – need to bypass the students, direct email/calls to parents; use social media, other avenues that are accessible to students and families • Move beyond paper to provide information to students/families • No sense of what's happening at other schools • Gaps in knowledge across and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time lag in communication • Communication with families/accountability when students don't show up at club – who is responsible for letting parents know? • More information by email – backpack express does not work • Transportation so that students can get from one campus to another • What are club offerings based on? • Better scheduling/ timing to complement other opportunities • More/different opportunities: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating and updating website with opportunities that are added later or are canceled • Better communication, greater ease of access/awareness • More information about citywide offerings • Sports – more similar to HS model and to prepare for HS: more and longer practices, cross-school competition, more choices • Unequal opportunities across schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information if club is canceled • Clarify who is supervising before and afterschool • Clearer expectations • Better coordination • Resources for OST should NOT come out of school improvement/ day-time budget • More sports – lacrosse, ultimate Frisbee • Run clubs 5 days/week • More offerings • Make choices more interesting • More developmentally responsive • School newspapers across Upper Schools

	<p>within schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity from central office about what's being offered • Family Liaison in Upper School (even across upper schools) to help with dissemination of information and opportunities • Transportation • Transportation – buses more days and later (5pm or 6pm departure time from schools) • Athletics: felt like bait and switch; wasn't interscholastic; sports that we were told would happen didn't; soccer more like pick up than legitimate sport • Students forbidden from use of school grounds after school • Provide access to clubs across schools • Academic extension opportunities: debate club, creative writing club, book discussion • Industrial arts opportunities • Don't expect teachers to lead clubs • Tap into OST professionals that exist in programs across Cambridge 	<p>robotics/technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More variety • Sports – cross-school competition • Inconsistency of offerings across school • Strong menu of options across schools – not school-bound • Discontinuity from term to term, with gutter period in between • Instability – if students didn't show up or teacher lost interest, clubs were ended • More collaboration with the Agenda for Children • Expand summer planning effort to school-year, include as part of advisory, include conversation about screen time • Social justice implications if clubs are not truly accessible to all – and if not accessible to all, do not do them • More opportunities for mastery over a full year/multiple years • Is there a way to tap into the expertise of local OST providers across the city? Have interested teachers go run something at OST program • Are we spreading choices too thin across all OST providers? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread opportunities across more days • Opportunities for students from across schools – equal access and awareness More science opportunities for boys • More opportunities at Amigos • Few school-wide events outside of school time • Family liaison role at Upper Schools • Ability to travel to other campuses – wasn't the point of common start/end times? • Tap into local expertise in OST programs, universities, etc. • Greater inclusion for students with special needs • Debate (Boston Debate League) • Have DHSP run school-based OST – a la Community Schools in K-5 • Designate one responsible party for running OST opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Centers – conflict with other opportunities • Consistency – from the beginning of the year, clarity about offerings each trimester • Discontinuity in choices from session to session, break between sessions • Relying on teachers • Who is teaching it? • How to better connect to professionalized ASOST staff/practices that exist throughout the city • Conduct survey monkey of students to get their interests • Tap into existing resources • Friday night/ weekend experiences • Take responsibility off of principals • Stipends for OST coordinator • Promise of cross-school opportunities has not been realized • Identify what was offered at each Upper School • Tap into range of OST offerings at CRLS, look at what rich suburban middle schools are doing
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Core Academic Curriculum (Math, ELA, Science, Social Science)
Comments on Individual Feedback Forms
Upper School World Café, May 2013

1. What is working well?

- ELA & Social Studies in 7th grade at VLUS
- Science is still working well at RAUC grade 7
- Math-great to have co-teacher
- Science-nice hand-on, interactive classroom
- Social Studies-project involving Cambridge history with parent interviews good
- What are the 8th graders going to have accomplished e.g., be able to give a discourse, thinking /compassion
- MCAS good/excellent scores
- A lot of enthusiasm from core teachers
- Advisory
- Larger cohort
- Music
- Better content compared to traditional curriculum
- Science experiments
- Engaging curriculum
- Committed teachers
- Larger cohort-more options
- Great improvements in Music & Art-to the other courses
- Project based learning
- The teachers care about the students
- The students find some parts of the curriculum that they like

2. How can we improve?

- Increase the reading and writing opportunities in ELA and Social Studies
- Find a new textbook series for Social Studies-anything but *History Alive* would be an improvement
- Increase opportunities for students to develop critical thinking skills by encouraging them to read and formulate questions based on their reading rather than spoon feeding information and directing discovery in worksheets
- Provide more in-classroom support to teachers by providing funds for assistant or student teachers in every classroom to provide teachers with time they need to differentiate learning and provide individual feedback to students
- Don't teach to the ELA test in Social Studies
- Provide more opportunities for immersive learning and deeper engagement
- Need to teach Technology (Engineering in the 6, 7 & 8th grades. Students take the 8th grade Science & Technology/Engineering MCAS and have not seen 25% of the content since it is not taught in our middle school. They go in unprepared, and many will come out believing they are "bad at Science" because they couldn't do well on the test. This subject would best be taught in a classroom/lab distinct from the Science classroom as there is a different preparation for professions teacher this subject. If Massachusetts does adopt the NGSS, it will also have a T/E component since Mass. was one of the leaders in creating NGSS and last year Mass. 8th graders scored 2nd in the world (to Singapore) in Science.

- Rigor-there is none
- No writing
- Very few projects, very few special events related to academics.
- Lacking challenge, rigor, interesting assignments, long-term projects
- My child cannot write at all and I'm not sure what to do to help. Math tutors are normal, but writing tutors?
- More opportunities for project based learning in all classes
- ELA & Social Studies-curriculum a bit dry; routine-feels like an effort to "cover" material without in-depth discussion/exploration
- Academic challenge periods not meaningful/district experience
- Teachers should have ongoing training, mentoring & coaching in the principles and practices of Differentiated Instruction
- Longer school days
- Academic challenge-sounded like a great idea, but has been incredibly poorly executed. My child has not found any of them valuable-they have been completely below the level that would engage kids.
- English-it's a waste of school time to have the students reading during class time. This activity has dominated the class. There has been no sustained writing. The class time would be better used for meaningful discussion. Students should be reading at home.
- Social Studies-the curriculum is structured at much too low a level-the activities are quite junior-makes a timeline, and ad, a wanted poster. These are art projects not Social Studies. There has been no research project, no writing. My child has not received back any graded work in Social Studies at all.
- Social Studies-writing, reading, research missing most tends to be coloring or drawing
- ELA-read more classics/write more
- Science-more time for projects and labs
- Math-more differentiation
- More connections in Math, (Science)
- Differentiated learning groups-my kids are not being taught math
- Simplify Math offering communication
- Level of homework not challenging
- Too many periods in a day
- Encourage greater/higher expectations for adapting materials or generalizing their own materials for teachings
- Incorporate project-based learning into core subjects. My kids are not being motivated by grades & performance on tests (or not). Teachers are teaching to the tests. Tests are measuring test taking skills and affect/motivation, lastly knowledge. One solution: bring back humanities or, in other ways, combine core curriculum into bigger-picture projects.
- Classroom management (and proactive strategy, rather than punitive, reactive discipline) skills matter. I hear that there is a big problem with this in the Science classroom. It needs to be addressed.
- The district needs to raise the bar on curriculum and content. My 7th grader has read only one novel this year and the teacher read the book to the class. I think that the kids can handle more. They can read more.
- My son is being asked to do 1/8 of what he was asked to do last year in the 6th grade. The work there is less engaging. Very disappointing.
- Low expectation/no rigor in core curriculum

Special Area Subjects (World Language, Visual and Performing Arts)/ Electives
Comments on Individual Feedback Forms
Upper School World Café, May 2013

1. What is working well?

- Performing Arts-it brought my kid out of her shell
- Great music program
- Music, art
- French-student enjoy the class-they have had exposure to vocabulary
- Lots of different groups (but not for my child)
- More options to engage in special subjects
- Music department is doing real well
- Language is much better in the 7th & 8th grade
- Have so many students involved in Performing Arts
- Rave Music, Art Dept. great
- Beyond the 4th Wall a terrific experience for the kids-not supported by school though
- Fantastic music, art, art electives, music electives
- High quality of curriculum has our son very engaged
- The teachers are fantastic and connected to the curriculum
- Variety-art, music, drama-terrific
- Glad world language is on a ½ year schedule instead of trimester

2. How can we improve?

- By adding foreign language at early age-5th grade
- Music, art and language should carry the same weight as the other core curriculum
- We need industrial arts. High school has great program.
- More choice in world language-not just French & Spanish
- More after school choice, option to participate at other schools
- Why do they not have a textbook or bound booklet
- It is difficult for a middle school student to keep a year's worth of handouts organized
- Students should practice oral skills more. My son gets an "A" in foreign language but cannot complete a full sentence. There needs to be a balance between oral and written skills.
- Languages-textbooks that student can bring home (at least a booklet w/handouts for the year
- More speaking
- Concerned that since band, orchestra and chorus are elective, some student stop doing music after 5th grade
- Need a group for instrumental/strings
- Need more development for advanced students
- Foreign language-program for native speakers
- Offer elective more than once
- Seems like fewer students are playing instruments this year-observed that many student who had participated in band in past years stopped this year because band is not an elective
- More teachers should be involved in teaching electives
- Offer popular electives more than once a year

- Make placement in elective more clear-be sure that teachers want to teach it so they have genuine enthusiasm
- Academic challenge-did not-my student reported that it felt like a waste of time. When we went to the showcase in December for the Academic Challenge classes, it was very poorly presented.
- Keep musical instruments in 8th grade not an option to opt out-they would have to take it
- Not challenging
- Longer day-schedule
- No clear definition of what Academic Challenge is
- Disconnect between Beyond the 4th Wall performance & school support
- Still too bad that students have to choose between chorus & band
- Need engineering electives
- Make Academic Challenge all day long: project based, multi-subject, cross disciplinary
- World Language: the Innovation Agenda was promoted as a way to increase cohort size and thus richness of electives but the language offerings shrank, hours of foreign language and effectiveness also decreased
- Using Academic Challenge to both help failing students and challenge other students is not happening and needs to be improved
- Electives are not necessary and are not a good use of time. Nothing good comes out of it and they are very badly done. Kids are bored out of their minds and are not learning anything.
- We have been threatened with whole class detention
- Better communication around electives
- Better variety of electives

School Community/Climate/Family Engagement
Comments on Individual Feedback Forms
Upper School World Café, May 2013

1. What is working well?

- At CSUS-parent organizations-School Council, PCO, head of schools chats
- Dance
- Advisory-Improv Boston
- Concerts in January & April
- Homework web page at VLUS is great way for students & parents to keep track of work
- We have a good turnout at on site school events, representative of the school population. Head does a good job of reaching out to families often overlooked. (VLUS)
- Monthly coffees
- Arts night
- RAUC parent group has worked well-brought families to help out at events, cookouts, help to get families to mingle and see new faces
- Have a 5th grade dance so student will feel welcome to the new school
- Social merging of schools going well
- Larger peer group good
- Administration attends all parent organization meetings. We have both a parent organization and School Council; however, the same small group of parents attend. Glad to have the interaction in these meeting though.
- Larger cohort
- Arts programming-brings kids & families together
- Email & the backpack express
- Very good philosophy being communicated top down
- Students seem to get along will. My daughter enjoys the larger grouping of students.

2. How can we improve?

- Advisory-more project oriented
- District wide school directory process didn't work well
- Hard for parents to meet each other-maybe more social events-potluck dinners, multi-cultural, talent show
- Have a newsletter-every week or 2 or even monthly- showcasing the work being done in different grades & subjects. Like the nice newsletter at Peabody in past years.
- A good family engagement activity might be a talent show. We had them at Haggerty and it brought in the entire community & was a huge success.
- More school functions
- Directories are a glaring failure that makes the job of us promoting Cambridge schools to other families more difficult
- 8th grade communication very low expectations
- 8th grade website academic pages
- Harsh sounding rules-sounds too punitive to well-behaved scholars. It's not so punitive in the de facto situation, but it sounds hard. Need more ways to help the well-behaved
- By October 1st create a simple list of all of the students by grade so families know who is in the school. Would love phone number, parents' names & email-with an op out option
- Have different entrance for K-5 vs. 6-8. Make them truly different schools

- Not as warm as K-8
- Middle school recess needs to have more staff watching them outside-more structure-assistant principal or a man needs to be out there
- Administration needs to be much more welcoming to parents/families
- Reach out to 5th grade families sooner. First family info night was April 30-too late.
- Be consistent in use of language
- Don't worry about full color graphics
- Family engagement drops off dramatically as scholars become more independent; would be good to have a website to refer to so that we could discuss what's happening in classroom
- Many messages seem centralized; it's sometimes difficult to know when and how to participate as a parent. School newspaper, for example, is there a faculty advisor, or should a parent help?

Schedule and Communicating Student Progress
Comments on Individual Feedback Forms
Upper School World Café, May 2013

1. What is working well?

- Advisory group good
- Communication with teachers individually
- Student Progress Reports & report cards
- Schedule-it works reasonably well as is but lots of room for improvement
- Communication-school clerk very good at email communication
- Lead teacher system at our school is excellent-they are very active
- Engrade.com-great way for parents to see what is going on with grades
- Parent teacher conference at end of each trimester good
- Having a pre report card that allows parents to see how their scholar is doing in advance of report cards so that we can reach out to teachers and see how we can support them and our scholar at home
- Teachers are very responsive and invested in making system work, they reach out for suggestions on how to support scholar
- Schedule has a lot of interesting content-our son loves the variety and change of classes
- Attempt at consistency
- Regular updates

2. How can we improve?

- Overall communication with leadership most especially at Vassal
- Progress report (interim) not helpful in any way
- Have all teachers call their classes the same like red/yellow/blue/green not having each teacher call them letters or numbers. Then if you send students to their “yellow” class, everyone has a place to go. The current system was confusing to my 6th grader.
- Send homework & project grades home. I have seen nothing at all- think I used to have to sign off on tests and assignments.
- Report cards are vague in terms of strengths and weaknesses. This coupled with the lack of rigor and how easy it is to get straight “A’s”, really makes a parent wonder.
- The “learning cohorts”-in that the same 22 kids are in Math, ELA, Science & Social Studies together-did not work for my child. There were many bright kids she never had a chance to meet this year. I know kids-the children of parents I met at meetings-that I had to introduce to my daughter. She had few friends this year and I blame the learning cohorts for that. She has no idea who many of the bright kids are.
- Teachers need to offer progress report conferences to all families regardless of how student are doing in their progress reports
- Move to 5 day
- Too chaotic
- Difficult to coordinate with k-5 school
- 6 day-bells and whistle at expense of balance & depth. Doesn’t work w/PT SPED staff.
- Need ½ hour/day for longer recess & lunch (not for more activities)
- Report cards need to change to include effort and improvement
- The report card can sound more alarming than they really are. When I’ve followed up with teachers they assure me our son is doing better than appears on card
- Very generic report card structure-but honestly, there are a ton of kids. I don’t know how else it could be more substantive

- Schedule can be confusing for parents (what day is it?) but our son seems fine
- Clearer report card
- More conference opportunities
- “360” review process (all subjects)
- Better parent teacher discussion/dialog
- Bathrooms appear unsanitary
- Physical plant

Out-of-School-Time
Comments on Individual Feedback Forms
Upper School World Café, May 2013

1. What is working well?

- Moms ran 2 of the clubs. They are both moms of 3. How sustainable is this, though it is nice knowing they are invested at least while kids are there.
- Early morning math support & study session at Vassal Lane have been helpful
- Great club options at RAUC
- Great communication about options
- Great to have the same start & finish time for all schools
- Beyond the 4th Wall, media arts @ CRLS, theater, financial literacy
- At CSUS-math counts, soccer, newspaper club, jazz band

2. How can we improve?

- More clubs out of that building, which kids just want to get out of. It's hot/cold, smelly, uncomfortable.
- Another 1 ½ hours for a club is really hard to be motivated for, to stay in that building- more clubs out of the buildings
- Development of athletics program is much needed
- Coordinated communication through one central location about after school programs- on family liaison for all 4 schools
- Freedom for student to use the playground & fields for after school pick up games would be beneficial
- Sports-more/longer practice, more competition, more team spirit. This was a real let down. My child has played volleyball and hockey, but there were not games so far as I know.
- City-wide after school activities need to be better advertised
- School events-there used to be a lot at the Peabody but seem to be non at RAUC
- Communication of schedule threw us off, programs seemed to end or start & we weren't told. This could have been us misunderstanding
- More hands on Industrial Arts programs
- Make more transportation available-we just have Tues./Thurs. for now
- Would love more academically oriented clubs to expand on classroom learning, e.g., Debate Club, Science Club, book discussion, creative writing
- Not very much-athletics are a bait and switch-the program quietly disappeared-very disconcerting
- After school sports programs seem non-organized
- Communication-email parents-opportunities
- Coordinator
- Travel between locations