

## Discussion & Lunch Topics

The **SAME eight** topics will be discussed in the morning and afternoon, so parents won't miss out on conversations of interest. The discussions will be led by **trained facilitators**, graduate students at Lesley University (in Arts & Sciences and Education).



The discussions are designed to encourage **open, inclusive** dialogue representative of a range of experiences and perspectives. Each session will be structured to focus on a clear set of topics but will be adaptable to **parent participant interests** and will move through several tasks to accomplish three major goals: 1) highlight what is **working well** and would like the schools/districts to keep doing or expand, 2) discuss what could be **improved** in the district, and 3) work together to problem-solve and craft **potential action steps** towards positive change.

### MORNING / AFTERNOON DISCUSSIONS (90 Minutes Each)

#### 1) Achievement / Opportunity Gap & Meeting the Needs of All Learners

- How do schools support **all students' learning** needs (ie the ones who are **struggling** academically, those who are not feeling challenged enough -- e.g. **advanced learners**, those who have **special needs**, or those who are "twice exceptional," etc)?
- How is **instruction** differentiated (ie tailored to each student based on their needs) ?
- Where there is an **achievement / opportunity gap** among groups of students with marginalized identities (ie potentially students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, immigrant students, students with disabilities, students who are learning English, etc), how are schools and the district working to address or "close" this gap? Do we as parents feel they are doing enough or have ideas for how to expand/ improve their work?
- What do we as parents feel should be done to ensure all students' learning needs are met on every level (in the classroom, in the school, and in the district as a whole)?

#### 2) Upper (Middle) Schools

- How are the upper (middle) schools meeting the needs of **all students**? What are specific concerns parents have about upper schools?
- How are these schools helping **transition** students from elementary school and then later onto high school? Do we as parents feel these transitions are well-supported?
- What is unique about the upper school **curriculum** and where is there variation among schools (ie math, world language, etc)? And what about the variation in test scores? What to make of them?
- Is there sufficient **transparency** regarding upper schools? What's going well and what needs work, and how can things be improved? What additional information do we need to understand the upper schools, and how do we get it?

- What attracts some CPS parents to look for alternative middle school options (ie **private / charter**, etc)? How do families leaving the district impact those who remain or the upper schools more broadly?

### 3) Recess, Free Play, Social Emotional Learning, & School Climate

- What are schools doing to support **fun, creative play, athletics, or exercise** for students?
- How much **recess** or free play time are students getting in school? How is that determined by the school or the district? Do we as parents feel that what our kids get enough physical activity or free play time?
- How are schools supporting the **social-emotional needs** of all students? Where are they successful and where are they lacking?
- How are schools fostering **positive school climates**? Do parents feel schools are open, inclusive spaces that can serve as **community centers**?
- Are students respecting each other regardless of **race**, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, income, political orientation, family's educational background, or other **differences**? How are schools addressing issues, e.g. **bullying**? Do we as parents have a clear understanding of school/district policies on these kinds of issues?

### 4) High School

- How is CRLS meeting the needs of all students? How is it addressing **achievement** or **opportunity gaps** for students with marginalized identities e.g. students with disabilities? What are specific concerns parents have about CRLS?
- How is the high school preparing students for **college** or supporting multiple **other post-graduation** paths?
- What are some issues faced by marginalized students at CRLS? In particular, what is it like for **students of color**? Are they being supported by faculty? And what about **faculty of color**? What steps is the high school taking to make CRLS an inclusive space?
- How do parents feel about the **start time** at CRLS and how much **sleep** or socioemotional support/ homework-life balance students have?
- What is the role of CRLS in managing technology or "screen time" such as **cell phone** use?

### 5) World Language / Immersion

- What are the different world language/ immersion programs offered in CPSD? How do they **vary** school by school?
- How does the **district inform parents** about the existence, pros, and cons of these programs, and how are these received by different communities? Which families do these programs draw vs. not? What are **barriers** to accessing these programs?

- What are some **challenges** faced by these programs at the school or district level? Are these programs working towards **fluency**? How are they meeting these goals? If they are falling behind, why do they think students are struggling to learn languages and move beyond the basics?
- Should world language/immersion programs be **expanded** to more schools?
- What is the role of parent/family support in **successful language learning**? What resource (e.g. afterschool, out-of-school) are available or could be created to make it more accessible to all?

## 6) Junior Kindergarten (JK), Kindergarten, & Lottery

- How does the Junior Kindergarten (JK) /Kindergarten **lottery** work? How easy is the process to navigate for parents? Where is it effective and where are there concerns?
- Do we as parents feel the lottery is “fair”? Does the lottery **privilege certain groups**? What is the role of the lottery in the district’s school choice system? How does it impact the demographics and culture of each individual elementary school?
- With current Lottery, there’re some schools that families are unlikely to get into. This can cause parents to put down a First Choice that’s not their true choice. Algorithms exist that do not penalize parents for putting down their **true First Choice**: what would be the impact on choice & assignment.
- Is there interest in pushing for **universal JK** (ie every child who is four will have a guaranteed space in a JK classroom)?
- What early childhood options are available to our children? How do we learn about the options? What are the **quality** and **affordability** are these options?

## 7) STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) / Arts & Music

- What are the current **STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) programs**? What are the current **arts and music programs**? How do they vary school by school?
- Is there enough time spent on STEM or arts/music? Do parents feel there is enough **depth of curricula** in these programs? Would we like to see these programs **expanded**? For example, should the Kodaly music program be expanded to more elementary schools?
- Are schools preparing students sufficiently for **STEM jobs** (ie from Kendall Sq. and around)? Or to understand the increasingly technology/science/data-driven world around us?
- What are **extracurricular options** for our children related to STEM and arts/music? How is the district and individual schools supporting the creation of alternative programming such as STEM clubs and serving to support their space needs?
- Are there **afterschool options** in STEM or arts/music? How do parents learn about these? What kinds of challenges do these programs face? What is parents/families role in supporting these programs?

## 8) Standardized Testing, MCAS, & Accountability

- What is the role of **standardized tests** in our schools / district? How much emphasis are teachers / administrators paying to them? What do parents think about standardized tests?
- To what extent are tests in our schools “**high stakes**” tests vs “**low stakes**”? High stakes tests are ones that students need to pass (e.g. for high school graduation requirements) and/or used to **measure teachers, schools, or administrators** for state/federal funding requirements, or professional evaluations. Low stakes are ones only used as data to better understand how much individual students learn, or what programs teach children.
- Without standardized tests, how can we determine which students are falling behind? How to ensure those who are most challenged get the **resource and support** they need, e.g. students from low-income background and students with disabilities/special needs?
- How do standardized tests **impact our school curriculum or focus**? To what extent is there “teaching to the test” in our schools? How do they impact student learning?
- Do standardized tests create **stress or social-emotional impact** on students? Or can test-taking be viewed as a useful skill for students to acquire? Can CPSD students **opt out** of standardized tests? Will there be any impact for their teachers or schools, e.g. on identifying achievement gap.

### **LUNCH DISCUSSIONS (40 Minutes Each)**

Lunch is provided, likely pizza. Please bring your lunch to the discussion below.

#### **1) Affinity Group Discussion: Parents of Color**

This is an open and inclusive space for any parents/caregivers who **identity as people of color** to discuss any issues in an “affinity group” setting. An affinity group is when people who share common identities come together to discuss issues. This space is intended to be a separate, **supportive** space where parents of color can connect with one another and discuss issues relevant to their children and schools in a **safe, confidential** manner.

#### **2) Panel Discussion: Parents Helping Parents: How to Advocate for Your Child**

Panelists include parent-leaders from Cambridge groups such as **SE-PAC** (Special Education Parent Advisory Council) and **CALA** (Cambridge Advanced Learner Association) as well as a lawyer who has worked with **immigrant parents**.

- How do we advocate for our own children in the **classroom** and at the **school** level?
- Do we know how to speak with our children’s **teachers** when an issue arises and feel comfortable/ confident/ competent in doing so? What would make us feel more prepared and equipped to handle situations as they arise?
- What kinds of **rights** do we have as parents advocating for our children?
- What are the different **resources** and **advocacy groups** that can support us?
- How do we advocate for our children at the policy level (district and beyond)?