

Cambridgeport School Teaching Climate

Teaching staff survey results and initial recommendations - April 2025

Cambridgeport School Equity Council Teaching Climate Subcommittee

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Context and methodology

The School Equity Council of Cambridgeport School consists of Principal Genteen Jean-Michel, Parent Liaison Kristen Emack, three elected staff representatives, and four elected caregiver representatives. Council subcommittees allow us to extend our work outside of Council meetings. Subcommittees include one or more Council members (ideally at least one staff member and one caregiver) and any number of other members of the school community.

Representatives Jen Martin (staff), John Mussman (caregiver), and Sarah Rosenberg (staff) serve on the Teaching Climate subcommittee. Our goal is to support robust, caring conversations about ways to enhance the teaching climate at Cambridgeport. Our work toward that goal is framed by two books: *Testing Education* by Kathy Greeley, and *Street Data* by Jamila Dugan and Shane Shafir.

From March 20 through April 4, the Teaching Climate subcommittee surveyed Cambridgeport's teaching staff: 49 people, including substitutes, therapists, paraprofessionals, teachers, aides, and coaches. We asked for anonymous responses to five questions shared via SurveyMonkey, and we promised to remove personal information before sharing a summary of responses with the SEC and the Cambridgeport community.

Our survey received 24 responses, a 49% response rate. We have endeavored to faithfully represent all responses in our summary below, while also elevating themes that were cited frequently.

We prioritize qualitative data, and we have tried to use succinct, clear language to describe themes. Phrasing such as "staff need" typically indicates a need expressed in numerous survey responses. "Some staff" typically indicates a relatively smaller number of responses, but still more than one. "Other responses mentioned include" indicates a list of themes not fully described elsewhere, each of which was cited by at least one response.

What sustains our teaching staff

What are you proud of in your work? [Q1]

What do you love about Cambridgeport? [Q5]

Cambridgeport's teaching climate has many strengths. Staff compare our school positively with other teaching environments they have experienced, especially regarding the consistently high level of skill, focus, and care of other staff members.

Staff are very proud of the relationships they have with students and the partnerships they have with families. They are proud of their contributions to the school as a community.

Staff are proud of their students' academic success and socioemotional growth, and of collaborating with other staff members to support students. They are proud of how they can build projects around student ideas. They are proud of their teaching.

Staff are also proud of doing challenging work, successfully implementing and adapting new curricula and initiatives for classrooms with many heterogeneous student needs. They are proud of putting the needs of the students first, and of our school culture that supports that shared priority.

Staff love the students, citing the diversity of our school's families and the general happiness of students at school. They love the whole community's shared values around teaching and caring for their students.

Staff deeply appreciate the thoughtfulness, care, and professional skill of other staff members.

What our teaching staff need

What barriers prevent you from doing your best work? [Q2]

What do you need to make your job less stressful and more joyful? [Q3]

Three needs were described in numerous responses to both questions: time/schedule, behavior/staffing, and respect/trust.

Staff need schedules that give them enough time to do their job. Some staff say their schedules cause the classroom pace to be pushed too fast. Some say that schedules are too rigid, or that the curricula that determine their schedules are too inflexible.

Staff would like more time with students; time for students to play and do projects; time with colleagues to collaborate, mentor, co-teach, and consult; and more prep time, which can end up happening outside of school hours and thus go uncompensated.

Staff want more time for family engagement, though some also want clearer expectations around communication with families.

Staff want to spend less time on tasks that seem irrelevant to teaching, including some kinds of professional development and administrative meetings.

Staff need more support for the wide variety of student needs: especially more paraprofessionals, co-teachers, special educators in their classrooms. Staff say that managing disruptions from a small number of students can take up a lot of attention and can be stressful.

Related needs mentioned include: effective deterrent consequences for disruptive student behavior; more regular student attendance; more guidance for paraprofessionals; more in-classroom staff to support inclusive classrooms, because it can be hard to schedule time for special education support via pullouts.

Staff need more trust and acknowledgment from school and district administration. They want their overall competence and hard work to be recognized and valued. They need more respect, to feel they are trusted as professionals to do their job well.

Staff want the importance and requirements of their roles to be better understood by administrators. When they make occasional mistakes, they hope to be met with flexibility, understanding, and support.

Staff want more open communication and more shared decision-making, and would value more opportunities to give input. They would like more focus and depth in administrative meetings.

Collaborative practices

Which of these collaborations would you be interested in for enriching your practice? [Q4]

Respondents could indicate as many options as they liked and also provide comments.

Half of respondents indicated that they would be interested in peer-to-peer classroom observations.

Between one-third and one-half indicated interest in (descending order): attending a conference/course with a colleague, a shared professional interest group, cross-disciplinary projects (e.g., for all-school shares), co-teaching.

A few respondents indicated interest in mentorships.

In comments, staff were very enthusiastic about more collaboration opportunities. They are interested in support for various co-teaching models, including special and general education teachers partnering in the classroom, and some are interested in shared interest groups that could deepen or extend the collaboration already happening in Wednesday meetings.

Some staff are concerned that more formal, top-down collaboration initiatives would create more work for them. Staff say that time for collaboration would be most likely to enrich their practice if it were unsupervised, informal, and included planning time.

Initial recommendations

We hope to bring people together to identify, advocate for, and implement measures that support the needs of our teaching staff. That could involve making recommendations to our School Equity Council, other school leadership teams, teaching staff, school administration, district administration, caregivers, PTO, elected officials, and advocacy groups.

We look forward to brainstorming more recommendations with others as the survey results are reviewed by our school community. Here is an initial list of recommendations that seem to us to emerge from the survey.

- ❖ Support peer-to-peer classroom observations and other optional, non-hierarchical, unsupervised peer collaboration.
- ❖ Create systems that strongly incentivize teaching staff feedback for school and district administrators.
- ❖ Reduce inflexible segments of schedule: expand what can be used for discretionary classroom purposes and for pull-out time.
- ❖ Align teacher and family expectations around teacher-family engagement, and allocate time.
- ❖ Rotate management of administrative meetings, so different staff members are responsible for choosing topics and protocols for each meeting.
- ❖ Identify administrative meeting time that can be repurposed for either prep time or unsupervised peer-to-peer collaborative time.
- ❖ Increase hiring for needs-based classroom staffing.
- ❖ Make curriculum coverage standards more flexible.

Moving forward

We intend to share this document with the School Equity Council at our 4/16 meeting, to be reviewed in accordance with a Making Meaning discussion protocol to ensure equity of voice and shared understanding. We equally intend to share this document with all teaching staff surveyed and with our school community.

Our expectation is that, following SEC discussion and advisory on 4/16, our subcommittee will continue to meet regularly with the addition of other interested people. We will use those meetings to further brainstorm and prioritize recommendations, to follow up on implementations, and to research and consider other matters related to the teaching climate at Cambridgeport.