

Greater Commonwealth Virtual School



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Greater Commonwealth Virtual School Council Brings Together Stakeholders Monthly to Help Shape School

GREENFIELD — Principal Andrew Costa is pleased to share that the Greater Commonwealth Virtual School Council meets monthly with students, parents, educators and community members to help bring all stakeholder's concerns and ideas to the forefront of planning for the school's future.

The School Council, comprised of Principal Costa, five staff members, including three educators from various grade levels, seven parents, and five students meets virtually once a month — typically on the second Tuesday of each month — to discuss concerns about the school, its needs, and the needs and desires of students, teachers and parents.

"We focus on all things regarding school improvement, with a lot of focus on family and student engagement," said Principal Costa. "We've had a lot of rich discussions about ways to further engage students and families outside the classroom, and a lot of rich discussions about school culture and services the school provides."

The council also provides input on educational goals for the school, identifying educational and emotional needs of students, and provides input to the Board of Trustees as part of the annual budget process.

Costa said one of the first things to come out of the School Council meetings — there have been four so far — is that students would like even more opportunities to interact with each other outside of the classroom, and not just through major events like student meetups. Realizing that desire existed led the School Council to begin planning a lunch bunch group that will meet virtually to hang out and talk while eating lunch together. Approximately 40 students have already signed up for the group, which will officially launch in January.

"I adore being in the meetings surrounded by students, parents, and important stakeholders who are all encouraged to share their viewpoints and how they think GCVS can best serve their

communities," said Family Engagement Liaison Anne O'Brien, who is a member of the council. "I just love the back and forth and that parents and students have a voice in their education."

O'Brien said her favorite thing about the council is that it empowers both students and parents involved and gives the students and parents ownership of the school that helps boost their interest in seeing GCVS succeed and achieve even more than it has already. While parent-teacher conferences keep parents informed about their student's progress in class, the School Council invites parents and students to weigh in on bigger picture things and the overall school's direction.

"Their voice is just as powerful as Principal Costa's, and that gives our students and their families the power to really affect change in the school," O'Brien said.

"It helps to really build our school community up," said Council secretary and high school science teacher Mary Beth Berrien. "Our stakeholders actually have ownership in our school, and when you're really invested in the school, that's when you want to make it the best that it can be."

Berrien said the council also helps elementary and middle school teachers share the vision with high school teachers, which helps to facilitate teamwork among grade levels and a shared vision for where students' education and school culture should be headed.

"We don't have the same walk in the hallway and see each other thing that brick and mortar schools have, so this is really a way to help increase the community engagement in our school at all levels," said Berrien, who helped found the School Council before the pandemic, and who helped kick it into high gear in recent months.

Science teacher Jack Czajkowski said the council is an important forum where educators can hear from parents and students and gain perspectives they wouldn't otherwise have just from working in the classroom.

"I've been teaching for almost 30 years and I have learned it's always important for lines of communication to be created, opened up and explored," said Czajkowski.

Czajkowski said council members are working to spread the word about the council throughout the school, and that the council encourages even more voices and stakeholders to attend meetings to share ideas.

"Our meetings are open meetings, so anyone can come to the meetings as a guest," said Berrien. "I really think this school council is necessary to make the community feel more involved in our school, especially since our students and families come from Provincetown to North Adams and many communities in between."

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A message from the Greater Commonwealth Virtual School