

January 25, 2023

**BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS SUBCOMMITTEE**

Virtual Buildings and Grounds Subcommittee Report  
Wednesday, January 25, 2023 at 6:00 p.m.  
Broadcast from the Media Studio  
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA

Called for the purpose of discussing updates on the Long-Range Building Study, and non-COVID safety concerns vs. benefits of allowing parents again to enter buildings to drop younger students, the second review of proposed edits to the Transportation Policy and to start discussing safety programs in schools, including lockdown drills.

Subcommittee Members Present: Member Rojas, Chair, Member Fantini

Other School Committee Members Present: Vice Chair Rachel, Member Hunter

Others Present: Vedad Konjic, Facilities Director, Dr. Michelle Madera, Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education, David Murphy, Chief Operating Officer, Dr. Carolyn L. Turk, Deputy Superintendent

**Chair Rojas** started the meeting at 6:01 p.m. and read the call of the meeting. He outlined the meeting's agenda and goals for the discussion which included:

- Hear any updates on the RFP for Long Range Building study
- Discuss non-Covid concerns about parents entering school buildings, and
- Review potential edits to the transportation policy
- Start discussion of school safety programs including lockdown drills

**Chair Rojas** highlighted the agreements of the meeting (below) and asked participants to introduce themselves and share how they responded to the short winter days:

- Speak and listen from the heart (respect)
- Step up/step back (watch air time)
- Expect and accept non-closure (work in progress)
- Bike rack (list of things that are important but should be addressed another time)
- Public comment would be limited to 3 minutes to allow for a broader discussion.

**Chair Rojas** turned the meeting to Dr. Turk who shared an update regarding the drop-off procedures for younger students and the allowance of families to walk students directly to classrooms. Prior to COVID, CPSD was without a policy and the elementary schools operated under their own guidelines. During the pandemic's strict protocols, families did not enter school buildings. Now that protocols have been relaxed, principals have shared that the pandemic policies (of families not entering schools during morning drop-off) helped establish successful morning routines which they would like to more formally adopt. Dr. Madera echoed Dr. Turk's comments. In addition, Dr. Madera highlighted the priority of student safety. As families were entering the buildings from several entrances and in an unstructured way, student safety was more challenging to monitor. She also underscored that bus students did not have the opportunity for family drop-offs at classrooms. She highlighted that classroom time could be maximized allowing for increased SEL practices.

**Member Fantini** agreed with Drs. Turk and Madera. He highlighted that the most recent union contract increased the time that teachers can connect with parents and allow for more conversations. He believes it is important to ensure that parents have multiple access points. Dr. Madera stressed that the earlier students are in the classroom without parents, it is easier for both students and educators. **Member Hunter** thanked Dr. Madera and agreed that CPSD can't overemphasize student safety. **Member Rachel**

January 25, 2023

**BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS SUBCOMMITTEE**

thanked Dr. Turk and Dr. Madera and wanted to share another perspective. Since the pandemic, she is fearful that families are feeling less connected to teachers and school communities. She has heard concerns and believes that there is a role for families to be in schools to see the day-to-day. She understood the new rationale but shared her discomfort. Dr. Turk underscored that there is communication with families regarding the access points and there are many ways to become involved members of school communities. Dr. Madera underscored the full attendance at a recent MLK breakfast which was planned and monitored. Mr. Murphy shared that his former district funded additional engagement opportunities to facilitate family connections. Many districts face similar challenges that require creative thinking. **Chair Rojas** highlighted the importance of supporting teachers. He agreed that schools should brainstorm ways for unstructured opportunities for families to interact with educators. community.

The conversation pivoted to the long-range building study. Mr. Konjic shared that he is working with consultants. Buildings have been evaluated and the information is now with cost estimators. Preliminary numbers are currently with the City Manager. His team is identifying spaces within buildings that could fill the need for breakout spaces which has been identified as a priority by educators. He is looking at floorplans with the goal of increasing the square footage is smaller classrooms. Many buildings do not have additional land and his team is looking into possibilities of building up. His team (with consultants) is crafting a master plan for 10 schools taking into consideration current and projected enrollment as well as flood zones, community needs, and other challenges. He shared that within the next three months, he plans to prioritize the list of schools/projects. His team regularly provides updates to the City Manager and Deputy City Manager and plans to conduct a workshop with school leadership to discuss priorities and limitations. At the next subcommittee meeting, Mr. Konjic will share the results of the workshop. Feedback will be provided to consultants and he will work with the city to secure funding.

**Member Fantini** asked if the project includes a review of the ventilation and circulation systems and Mr. Konjic confirmed that this was included in the scope of the projects and will be included in the report.

**Member Hunter** asked if green spaces surrounding the schools were being looked at and highlighted that CPSD's systems should be green and clean. Mr. Konjic answered that reviewing outside areas was not part of the project beyond identifying areas for expansion. He highlighted that the priority is to determine if a space should be rebuilt or renovated. Once the team begins the design process, they will focus on green environments. **Chair Rojas** asked if consultants were looking at buildings with future enrollment projections in mind, as well as assessing their potential future uses. Mr. Konjic confirmed the consultants are assessing 10 elementary schools and the Rindge Avenue Upper School. CPSD will be provided with a guide and decisions will then need to be made (renovate or rebuild) by CPSD in partnership with the city. **Vice Chair Rachel** underscored Chair Rojas' comments and shared the district will be adding new programs such as Universal Pre-K and the dual language immersion program. She also shared that the High School Extension Program is currently housed in a swing space which is not ideal. She believes the programming question is critical to these discussions. **Member Fantini** highlighted that there are no gymnastic spaces in the schools. In addition, he would like to have consultants share their findings at an upcoming School Committee meeting. Mr. Konjic agreed. **Chair Rojas** highlighted that organizational partnerships could be considered (space rentals, etc.) for cost-saving measures.

**Chair Rojas** pivoted the discussion to the student transportation policy revisions. He confirmed that a typo needs to be corrected in the written policy. In addition, he shared that Maureen MacFarlane, legal counsel, confirmed that the current legal stature stating that the School Committee provides student transportation is accurate. The text will remain the same. Regarding free MBTA cards being provided to students, Claire Spinner, CFO confirmed that the city covers this expense. As such, language will not be added to the transportation policy. **Chair Rojas** suggested that a motion should be brought to the School Committee to correct the typo in the policy.

**Chair Rojas** passed the floor to Dr. Turk. She underscored that the subcommittee should continue to keep construction projects as part of their regular agenda moving forward. Regarding lockdown drills, Dr.

January 25, 2023

**BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS SUBCOMMITTEE**

Turk shared that these take place periodically. She highlighted that the subcommittee may be interested in learning more from our safety colleagues. Mr. Konjic shared that Dr. Greer asked him to put together a proposal for a safety assessment of district buildings. Now that Mr. Murphy is onboard, he will lead this process. Mr. Konjic has currently identified 10 companies that could do this work. In addition, Mr. Konjic has reached out to the police department for their input. The goal is for the chosen consultant/company to review each building to assess safety protocols/features such as cameras, access, and safety procedures. Working in partnership with Dr. Greer, Mr. Konjic is hopeful that school assessments can be made this spring while buildings are occupied. **Member Hunter** shared that she is chair of the School Climate Subcommittee, and she believes that there may be some overlap in their efforts. She highlighted the topic of health and safety issues including medical equipment such as defibrillators. **Chair Rojas** agreed that these conversations should be coordinated. **Vice Chair Rachel** highlighted that Dr. Greer mentioned the review of bulletproof glass/windows throughout the schools.

**Chair Rojas** summarized the conversations noting that two separate topics were discussed: 1.) buildings assessment report that is due in spring/summer and 2.) safety programs and trainings. He asked Dr. Turk if she could assist him in identifying appropriate people to discuss these trainings at an upcoming subcommittee meeting. Dr. Turk agreed.

**Chair Rojas** shared that the subcommittee's next meeting in March conflicted with the NSBA Annual Conference. He planned to reach out to the group to determine a rescheduled date.

**Chair Rojas** concluded the meeting at 7:08 pm.