

**Virtual Communications & Community Relations Subcommittee
Thursday, May 25, 2023, at 6:00 p.m.
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02138**

Called for the purpose to share updates on CPSD caregiver and community communication and engagement work and determine the next steps

Subcommittee Members Present: David Weinstein (Co-Chair), Fred Fantini (Co-Chair), Ayesha Wilson

Other School Committee Members present: Vice Chair Rachel

Also Present: Sujata Wycoff, Director of Communications, Monica Leon, ICTS Project Manager

Co-Chair Weinstein began the meeting at 6:05 p.m. by welcoming the group and reading the call of the meeting.

Co-Chair Weinstein shared the agreements of the meeting:

Agreements

- Speak and listen from the heart (respect)
- Step up/step back (watch air time)
- Progressive Stacking approach to conversation
- Expect and accept non-closure (work in progress)
- Bike rack (list of things that are important but should be addressed another time)

Public comment

- People will have three minutes to present their comments, after which time they will be muted by the Executive Secretary. (If need be, time will be limited to two minutes per person to ensure everyone can participate.)
- If people want to speak again, they will need the chair to call on them and be unmuted.
- The aim is to foster greater back-and-forth, which is valuable for subcommittee meetings

Co-Chair Weinstein asked participants to introduce themselves and passed the floor to Ms. Wycoff and Ms. Leon to present an update on ParentSquare. The presentation can be found on this [website](#). Ms. Wycoff stressed the successful partnership with Communications and ITSS in moving forward with ParentSquare. Ms. Wycoff highlighted that CPSD moved to ParentSquare to utilize a single system of communications. The platform replaced several communications platforms and allows recipients to receive messages in their preferred language. Non-registered users still receive emails but do not have the full functionality offered to registered users.

Currently, ParentSquare is able to connect with 99.8% of caregivers; has 65% of registered caregivers; 85% of students have at least one registered caregiver; and translates 37 languages.

Ms. Leon enthusiastically shared that direct messages between families and teachers/administrators have doubled since December. The team has a goal of increasing the usage of the ParentSquare app as this is the best way of communicating. She highlighted that ParentSquare has been instrumental in communicating bus route updates. Ms. Wycoff commended the tremendous undertaking of implementing the bus route alerts. In addition, Ms. Leon highlighted ParentSquare's ability to send secure documents such as report cards and i-Ready reports. The team continues to look for more opportunities such as these. Ms. Leon underscored the potential applications of increasing communications with clubs and sports teams through ParentSquare and StudentSquare.

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At 6:30 p.m. the first half of the presentation concluded and **Co-Chair Weinstein** opened the floor for questions. **Co-Chair Fantini** thanked the presenters and asked the following questions/comments:

- Who are the school contacts for ParentSquare?
- Can parents opt out of overwhelming communications?
- Can teachers attach videos to their ParentSquare communications?
- He noted that some parents shared experiences of mishaps with bus route updates.
- He is looking forward to sports updates.

Ms. Leon and Ms. Wycoff responded that principals, assistant principals, clerks, and family liaisons take the lead with ParentSquare. The team is looking into a digest option to assist with managing overwhelming communications. Teachers can attach and imbed multimedia communications. Ms. Wycoff noted that there have been some challenges with technology on the buses.

Co-Chair Weinstein asked about the language translation capabilities and if recipients are aware that the translation is autogenerated. He hopes that CPSD is communicating that interpreters are available. He shared that ParentSquare's calendar feature is very helpful and believes this should be communicated with families.

Member Wilson thanked the presenters and asked about trainings for teachers and administrators. Ms. Leon shared that her team is very flexible with their training approaches and knows that each group has different needs. She has forged a connection with Tom Arria, CRLS Athletic Director, to use ParentSquare and StudentSquare as communications tools for sports teams. Ms. Wycoff highlighted that refresher trainings would be taking place in August for clerks and liaisons.

Co-Chair Weinstein expressed his interest in capturing data on individual students and their success plans and how ParentSquare could support these efforts. He asked if ParentSquare would be replacing the current bus tracking app. Ms. Leon was unsure about the future of the current bus tracking app. Currently, the bus tracking app and ParentSquare do not align. She is hopeful that parents will start relying more on ParentSquare. Her team is working with Tina Fisher, Transportation Supervisor, who is using ParentSquare on a limited basis.

Co-Chair Weinstein shared that he believes that most CRLS students stay updated on clubs and sports via Instagram. He inquired if the student leaders could send out messages via Student/ParentSquare and not just club advisers. Ms. Leon affirmed that her team needs to investigate various methods of communication, keeping top of mind that messaging needs to be on a secure platform. She believes that students will download the app when it becomes the primary mode of communication for club and sports messages. Ms. Wycoff confirmed that StudentSquare is accessible in multiple modes and she is hopeful to boost registrations and may use Falcon Block to encourage registrations. **Co-Chair Fantini** inquired about usage by Cambridge community groups such as the senior center and Ms. Wycoff confirmed that community groups have access and believes there is more potential in this area.

At 7:04 p.m., Ms. Wycoff shared the second half of her presentation. She highlighted the importance of the cadence of communications, noting Dr. Greer's weekly newsletter. She stressed the importance of not sending out too many communications and the priority of weaving messaging into Dr. Greer's newsletter. **Co-Chair Fantini** mentioned the potential of a partnership with the city's newsletter. Ms. Wycoff confirmed that the city was a partner but she is hopeful to engage the city more. **Co-Chair Fantini** asked if there was a review of the CPSD website. Ms. Leon shared that the website may be moving to a new content management system, which is a significant undertaking. Her team is currently focused on cleaning up the website's content to help ensure a smoother migration. **Co-Chair Weinstein** inquired how the individual school websites are supported, noting that they vary across the district. Ms. Wycoff noted that Creative Services handles the schools' website postings to help with consistency. **Member Wilson**

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asked how School Councils use the website and Ms. Wycoff confirmed that the websites are a source of information for the School Councils.

Co-Chair Weinstein noted the incredible work of Ms. Wycoff and Ms. Leon and asked about the major areas of focus on the horizon. Ms. Wycoff highlighted that a strategic communications plan was currently being reviewed by Dr. Greer. Ms. Wycoff is committed to excellence and elevating customer service. Her goals include establishing structures and processes for communications and noted that tools are important avenues but strategy is a priority. She is planning for an annual professional learning opportunity with school clerks and is in the process of making an animated video to share the district plan. Ms. Leon highlighted that her team is always mindful of increasing equity and access to all communications. Ms. Wycoff stressed that it is a collaborative effort and it takes time to bring people along in the journey and move the needle.

Co-Chair Weinstein thanked the participants and closed the meeting at 7:34 p.m.