

**Communications & Community Relations Subcommittee Virtual Meeting
Wednesday, October 30, 2024 at 5:30 p.m.
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02138**

Called for the purpose of providing an update on key findings from the spring 2024 Communications and Content Survey and to share an update on the CPSD's website content management system.

Subcommittee Members Present: Elizabeth Hudson (Chair); David Weinstein

Other School Committee Members: Vice Chair Caroline Hunter

Also Present: Monica Leon, Project Manager; Dr. Lee McCanne, Chief Information Officer; David Murphy, Interim Superintendent; Lily Rivera, Senior Communications Specialist; Damon Smith, Interim Chief Operating Officer; Lisa Waters, Digital & Creative Services Manager

Chair Hudson opened the meeting at 5:33 p.m. and asked the Executive Secretary to read the Call of the Meeting. The Executive Secretary then gave the roll call of subcommittee members present: Member Hudson PRESENT; Member Weinstein, PRESENT; Member Harding ABSENT

Chair Hudson turned the floor over to Mr. Smith who then introduced his fellow presenters. He also recognized Interim Superintendent David Murphy and asked him to say a few words.

Mr. Murphy thanked the team and shared that he would be join the group for only a brief time as he had another meeting to attend.

He noted the team's important work their ongoing efforts to improve the district's communications systems. He highlighted that the team continually strives to meet the needs of internal and external stakeholders. He underscored that the Communications survey was comprehensive but not academic or scientific. He highlighted that the district's communications strategy was an iterative process that would always need to be revisited. Regarding the website, Mr. Murphy noted that the district' has not been 100% satisfied with the vendor who manages the back end. He shared that the website is comprehensive a significant project to manage.

Mr. Murphy turned the floor over to Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith and the team gave the following presentation which can be found on this [website](#).

He shared an overview of the agenda which included:

- District & Strategic Communications Plan Review
- Survey Overview
- Communications
 - Strategic Adjustments
 - Actions Taken
 - Next Steps
- Website Improvement Project
 - Survey Results
 - Caregiver Feedback Sessions
 - Next Steps
- Questions

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Mr. Smith noted that the survey was part of the District's strategic plan with a goal of collecting data from at least 40% of CPSD families representing the demographic makeup of the district.

Ms. Rivera shared the team's plan to use the survey data to inform their work. She highlighted the team's intention to expand staff training in using plain language. It was noted that the data would improve the quality and usability of both the website and ParentSquare.

Key findings from the survey included:

Areas of Strength

- How informed families / caregivers feel (multifaceted approach of a communications tool, website, social media, multimedia)
- Ability to choose language and how messages are received in ParentSquare
- Volume of communication from schools

Areas of Growth

- Repetitiveness of communication at school and district levels
- Continued learning on ParentSquare settings and features for optimal experience and improved two-way communication
- Building consistency at the classroom level in communication cadence and frequency

As a result of the community's feedback, the team made adjustments to the CPS Connect newsletter. Some the changes included shifting the send time to 5:30 p.m. and including an "In this Issue" preview and "Need to Know News". Ms. Rivera also noted a renewed emphasis on training clerks and family liaisons and ParentSquare training for new teachers.

Mr. Smith opened the floor for questions. Highlights of the exchanges include:

- The survey fell short of its goal of a 40% response rate with 33% of families responding. They are still reviewing the data to determine the demographics of those who responded.
- A 33% response rate is considered high when compared to other districts.
- The survey was offered in multiple languages with the goal of increasing engagement.
- The importance of meeting families "where they are at".
- Ensuring that family liaisons are engaged and sharing feedback to the Communications team.
- Communications platforms are continuing to evolve
- Including Office Hours clerks and family liaisons for training and to solicit feedback.
- CPS Connect has an average open rate of 60-65%

The floor was turned to Ms. Waters, Ms. Leon and Dr. McCanne to discuss website improvement efforts.

Highlights of their presentation include:

- Website improvement working group members
- Caregiver feedback session and the creation of 5 small working groups to solicit feedback.

Working groups include:

1. What will your child be learning this year?
2. What before or after school opportunities are available to your child?
3. How are you or can you get involved in your child's school?
4. How can you sign up for a School Committee meeting?
5. Open Format – search for and share what you want to know more about

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It was noted that families wanted to see more curriculum included on the website as well as the challenges of addressing differing needs of caregivers with younger vs. older students. The importance of creating a streamlined user experience was highlighted as well.

Dr. McCanne shared the next steps for website enhancement:

- Sept. - October Planning for Caregiver Feedback sessions
- October 30 - Presentation to Communication & Community Relations Subcommittee
- November (in person) & December (remote) - Caregiver Feedback sessions
- December - Analyze and summarize caregiver feedback
- Jan. - Feb. 2025 - Student & Staff Website Survey
- March 2025 - Vendor Demos
- April - May - RFQ and procurement Process
- July - August - CMS Set-up & Testing

The discussion was opened up to the group with the following topics addressed:

- The importance of involving faculty and staff and connecting with department leadership
- Sharing the workload of updating web pages
- Students' navigation of the website – example of activities portal

Caregiver, Lily Havstad, shared that the School Committee should consider additional platforms for outreach including ParentSquare and newsletters. She noted the importance of inter-family communications and the usefulness of class lists and the family book in engaging families in helping to create a stronger school community.

Ms. Waters shared that the opt-in rate for the family book has been low and that the district is always mindful of student data privacy. She noted that newsletters could help promote and raise awareness of the family book. Ms. Rivera highlighted that CPS Connect now includes a recap of the School Committee meetings.

Chair Hudson noted the confusion among families regarding programs administered by the CPSD versus the City. **Member Weinstein** appreciated Ms. Havstad's comments and shared that the Committee could be more thoughtful in its outreach noting that paper communications should be considered. **Vice Chair Hunter** offered her involvement as well as the Executive Secretary's in helping to enhance the School Committee's web pages. She also suggested that the Communications team consider reaching out the Committee's student members, Urban Barua and Hermila Shimeles for their feedback and to boost the engagement of CRLS students.

Dr. McCanne and Mr. Smith gave closing remarks, highlighting the next steps. **Chair Hudson** asked to adjourn the meeting with a roll call vote of subcommittee members present: Member Hudson YAY; Member Weinstein, YAY; Member Harding ABSENT. (6:55 p.m.)