

May 22, 2023

SCHOOL CLIMATE SUBCOMMITTEE

**School Climate Subcommittee
Monday, May 22 at 6:00 p.m.
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02138**

Called for the purpose to discuss school climate as it relates to student behavior and discipline and the related school district's policies and procedures; and to review and discuss the Cambridge schools' discipline policies and the restorative justice practices employed within the district.

Subcommittee Members Present: Caroline Hunter (Chair), David Weinstein, Rachel Weinstein

Other School Committee Members Present: Ayesha Wilson and Student Members Grace Clemente and Adelina Escamilla-Salomon.

Also Present: Jennifer Amigone, Director of Assessment & Accountability, Nicole Gittens, Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Schools, Karyn Grace, Interim Superintendent Office of Student Services

Chair Hunter began the meeting at 6:05 p.m. by welcoming the group and sharing the goals of the meeting:

- 1) To review and discuss school climate as it relates to student behavior and discipline and the related school district's policies and procedures.
- 2) To review and discuss the Cambridge schools' discipline policies and the restorative justice practices employed within the district.

Chair Hunter shared the following:

- Welcome and Agreements (5 minute)
 - 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 people want to speak again, they will need for the chair to call on them and be unmuted.
 - The aim is to foster greater back-and-forth, which is valuable for subcommittee meetings.

Chair Hunter introduced School Committee members and CPSD administrators.

She shared the following focused activity:

- *I'm going to ask you to go back to your high school years and your teen self and think about the most stressful event(s) and times when you were disciplined in your high school years. Think about how it affected you, what supports you needed, and the support you had or did not have. Let's use this sensitivity to focus on our work to provide the necessary supports for our students.*

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Dr. Gittens, **Member Weinstein**, and Chair Hunter shared their personal experiences as high school students who were disciplined or whose actions disappointed teachers and administrators.

Dr. Gittens gave the following presentation which can be found on this [website](#). Ms. Huffer and Ms. Amigone provided comments on the slides as well. Highlights of the presentation include:

- Restorative practices within the strategic initiatives
- Student Discipline Data Report which reports the disciplines that public school students in MA received for offenses committed.
- DESE's definition of discipline.
- Historical Discipline Data with the past 3 years showing the lowest levels. Within the district, students with disabilities, low-income students, African-American/Black students, and Hispanic/Latino students all proportionally had the highest discipline rates in CPS in SY21-22.
- Definitions of In-School and Out-of-School Suspension. Suspension rates in the past three years represent the lowest levels since 2013. Students with disabilities and African-American/Black students had the highest out-of-school suspension rates in SY21-22.
- The district's in-school and out-of-school suspension rates are below the state averages.
- School of Discipline Law (Chapter 222 of Acts of 2012) discourages exclusion from school and expects principals or their designees to exhaust all other options including peer mediation and restorative practices.
- Behavior within the MTSS Framework and providing a multi-tiered system of support
- Efforts underway including launching the Welcoming Schools Initiative, hiring a Restorative Practices Specialist, and providing district-wide Restorative Justice training through Suffolk University.

Following the presentation **Chair Hunter** shared her history as an assistant principal who was involved with the student discipline process and working with parents. She opened the floor for discussion. Dr. Gittens followed up on Chair Hunter's remarks noting the community-building efforts of CPSD and its goal of having scholars focus on academics which prevents negative behaviors. She noted the supports of MTSS.

Member Weinstein highlighted the strong adult network of the CPSD community, notably the family liaisons. He inquired about the CPSD data that is tracked outside of the DESE requirements. He would like to have access to these reports. Dr. Gittens shared that approximately half of CPSD schools are using the Educators Handbook. She is hopeful that all schools will use the Handbook next school year. The Handbook outlines a preventative stance that aligns with the MTSS model. For those schools using the Handbook, it captures the date, time, and location of the incidents, which typically occur outside of structured time, notably lunch and recess. The discussion highlighted the partnership with CPSD and the Cambridge Police Department whose approach is relationship-building with the students. It is less punitive but a partnership of care. **Member Wilson** appreciated learning more about the data, notably themes that may not be captured in the DESE data. Ms. Amigone shared that CPSD would be bringing back school climate surveys which will provide another assessment tool. **Student Member Clemente** highlighted the great work of the CRLS mediators and the impactful work of students helping students.

Dr. Gittens highlighted the national data that recess and lunch are the most problematic times of the school day. CPSD has a longer lunch period than most schools. **Student Member Escamilla-Salomon** noted the last slide of the presentation and the efforts underway for restorative practices. She expressed interest in student trainings in this area. Dr. Gittens confirmed that students will be involved in the

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trainings and stressed that these efforts must involve the community at large. She highlighted that restorative practices do not mean that there are no consequences and discipline could be involved. **Chair Hunter** shared a personal example of her time as an assistant principal when discipline and consequences were warranted.

The conversation turned to communications and reporting. **Member Weinstein** stressed the importance of uniform communications with parents across the district. Dr. Gittens shared that Speakfully provided an avenue for students and caregivers to report concerns. The platform is being used frequently and is accessible to all in the community. **Chair Hunter** inquired about the usage numbers and Dr. Gittens will connect with Mr. Fernandez regarding the data. **Member Weinstein** voiced the concerns of parents that the upper schools are dealing with behavioral issues. He wondered if this was post-COVID related. Dr. Gittens underscored that the pre and post COVID data was similar. She is in school approximately three days per week and does not witness behavioral issues. She stressed that monitoring social media was presenting a big challenge for teachers and administrators. Much time and energy are dedicated to navigating social media issues, many of which remain unresolved. **Vice Chair Rachel** asked about the timeline for teaching students about social media. Dr. Gittens responded that media information is covered in 3rd grade in Health & Wellness and she believes that 5th grade covers social media interaction between peers. She believes that 90% of reported incidents on Speakfully are related to social media. She plans to gather this data to share in an upcoming Weekly. The group discussed that most social media interactions occur outside of school which makes it unclear of CPSD's responsibility. **Chair Hunter** relayed information regarding a Cambridge Day article and stressed the importance of involving families in these conversations.

Dr. Grace shared her enthusiasm that the Office of Student Services is creating an MTSS dashboard which will curate the data from multiple sources (i-Ready, Aspen, etc.) with the goal of providing the big picture and making the information more accessible. Ms. Amigone promised to follow-up with the additional data that was mentioned in the discussion in an upcoming Weekly.

Chair Hunter thanked the speakers and participants and concluded the meeting at 7:35 p.m.