

October 12, 2023

## SCHOOL CLIMATE SUBCOMMITTEE

**School Climate Subcommittee**  
**Thursday, October 12 at 6:00 p.m.**  
**Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio**  
**454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02138**

Called for the purpose of discussing school climate at the Cambridge Upper Schools with a focus on the following: student behavior, discipline policies and restorative justice practices, and opportunities for peer leadership.

Subcommittee Members Present: Member Hunter (Chair); Member Weinstein; Vice Chair Rachel

Also Present: Betsy Bowman, Restorative Practices Specialist; Alice Cohen, SEL Lead Teacher; Manual Fernandez, Chief Equity Officer; Karyn Grace, Interim Assistant Superintendent of Student Services; Kim Huffer, Director of SEL; Sam Musher, Youth Advocacy Specialist

**Chair Hunter** began the meeting at 6:03 p.m. by reading the call of the meeting. She shared the following agreements for the subcommittee below:

- 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)

**Chair Hunter** led a focused activity asking attendees to think back to a stressful time in their middle school years and recall the supports they needed vs. what was available and how this experience impacted them. Ms. Cohen, Mr. Fernandez, and **Chair Hunter** shared personal stories.

**Chair Hunter** turned the meeting over to Mr. Fernandez who introduced the CPSD educators and their focus area. He highlighted that Ms. Bowman was new to the team and started in her role on September 1.

Ms. Huffer and Ms. Bowman shared the following [presentation](#).

Following the presentation, Chair Hunter opened up for questions and comments. **Member Weinstein** thanked the presenters and welcomed Ms. Bowman. He noted the alignment of the Committee's work on non-tolerance of hate crimes policy. He noted the importance of responding with the goal of striving for healing and learning. He highlighted the recent incident of anti-Semitic graffiti and its impact on the entire community. Ms. Bowman appreciated Member Weinstein's comments noting the mindset of restorative justice and that community members are all connected. **Vice Chair Rachel** shared her experience as a CRLS student and commended the school's approach to leading thoughtful conversations with the entire CRLS community during times of crisis. **Chair Hunter** shared her experience as a CPSD educator and Professor Charles Ogletree's work with CPSD. Dr. Grace expressed her appreciation for the presenters and her commitment to moving forward in an organized fashion but with a flexible mindset.

Ms. Musher spoke about student/peer leadership and opportunities for both middle and high school students. She noted that it was her second year in the role. She shared the following [slide](#) which outlined Student Peer Leadership opportunities at the upper schools and CRLS. She shared that the upper school student leaders voted to focus on school lunches. Ms. Musher gave kudos to the Food and Nutritional Services departments. Ms. Musher highlighted the work of CRLS leaders and noted the success of their student-planned equity summit held in April 2023. Their next summit will be held on January 24, 2024.

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Following Ms. Musher's remarks, **Chair Hunter** opened the floor for comments. **Vice Chair Rachel** commended the work of Ms. Musher and the food and nutritional services team. **Member Weinstein** shared his attendance at the student convenings and his enthusiasm for the upcoming Youth Equity Summit. **Chair Hunter** noted her former role as a student government advisor and the excitement of student leadership. She was impressed with the CPSD students and the Tufts students. She noted that she would like to have students involved in the early phases of the budget workshops. She highlighted the importance of having leadership opportunities for middle and high school students. Dr. Grace shared her passion for student agency. She noted her leadership experience as a CRLS student and the importance of creating opportunities for learning and giving students' voices.

**Vice Chair Rachel** shared that she is hearing from families of upper school students that there is a feeling of chaos and less than safe and accepting experiences. She underscored the innate challenges faced in the middle school years. She highlighted a past discussion regarding the hectic nature of the CRLS hallways and how the situation turned around when Principal Smith instituted hallway monitors. How can this team (CPSD educators) address the climate in grades 6, 7, and 8? Ms. Cohen responded that she had not done a lot of work with upper schools in the recent past. Regarding Tier 1 support, frequency and the duration of the connection is a priority over content. Asking adults to engage in conversations of any duration is important. Ms. Cohen noted that the pandemic impacted Tier 1 significantly. Social competency for young people is an issue. SEL is always happening positively and negatively. Students are still feeling the anxiety of the pandemic. Notably, their help-seeking behavior has been negatively impacted. These effects are reversible but it will take a coordinated effort. **Chair Hunter** asked how we can get help to schools where parents are complaining. School Committee members find out about problems from parents. How do we put in a preventive system so that Tier 1 work is the fabric of these schools? **Chair Hunter** echoed Ms. Cohen's sentiments regarding the importance of predictable environments. Ms. Huffer discussed the SEL Walkthrough tool that highlighted the areas of focus. She discussed how the team can be strategic around Tier 1 and create a sense of belonging. She noted three areas of focus across the district:

- 1.) Integrating SEL into academic instruction
- 2.) Youth voice and engagement
- 3.) Classroom and school climate (inclusive and equitable)

**Vice Chair Rachel** expressed her desire to participate in a SEL walkthrough if appropriate. Ms. Cohen gave an example of embedded SEL in academic instruction in kindergarten and high school classrooms. She underscored that SEL and academic learning do not exist at the expense of each other. **Chair Hunter** shared her experiences at recent visits to Florida schools with highly child-centered approaches.

**Chair Hunter** opened the floor to closing comments. Mr. Fernandez reminded participants that the Office of Equity Inclusion and Belonging was launched with students. He shared highlights from his student listening sessions resulting in a remote student summit. He highlighted that Title Nine advocates pushed the district and the School Committee to launch the reporting system, Speakfully. He has discovered since its launch that the percentage of reporters includes 40% students, 45% staff, and 14% caregivers. From May 2023 to the present, the majority of reporting has been done by staff and focused on equity issues, language, and school culture. Since the start of school, there has been one report related to social media.

**Chair Hunter** thanked the participants and closed the meeting at 7:22 p.m.