

October 24, 2023

**BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS SUBCOMMITTEE**

**Virtual Buildings and Grounds Subcommittee Report  
Tuesday, October 24, 2023 at 6:00 p.m.  
Broadcast from the Media  
Studio 454 Broadway,  
Cambridge, MA**

Called for the purpose of sharing the status and findings of the long-range Facilities Condition Assessment and Master Planning project and strategy, reviewing additional policy changes that may need consideration related to the Universal Preschool implementation in CPSD, and reviewing current policy and training around access to student bathrooms at CRLS.

Subcommittee Members Present: Member Rojas (Chair); Member Fantini

Other School Committee Members Present: Vice Chair Rachel

Others Present: Vedad Konjic, Facilities Director; David Murphy, Chief Operating Officer; Dr. Carolyn L. Turk, Deputy Superintendent.

**Chair Rojas** started the meeting at 6:03 p.m. and read the call of the meeting. He outlined the meeting's agreements and goals of the discussion:

**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)

**Discussion Goals:**

- Sharing the status and findings of the long-range Facilities Condition Assessment and Master Planning project and strategy
- Reviewing additional policy changes that may need consideration related to the Universal Preschool implementation in CPSD and
- Reviewing current policy and training around access to student bathrooms at CRLS.

**Chair Rojas** gave background on the purpose of subcommittee rules and led round-robin introductions and participants to share their favorite fall activities. He thanked Dr. Turk for her role on the Buildings & Grounds subcommittee.

Prior to the start of the discussion, **Chair Rojas** shared the following two comments from community members. He asked the group to keep these topics in mind during the discussion.

- 1.) The availability of gender neutral bathrooms in response to a family whose daughter was not allowed by her peers to access the girls' bathroom.
- 2.) Ensuring the universal preschool assignment process is equitable.

Mr. Murphy shared the following [presentation](#).

Mr. Murphy stressed the long-term names of the facilities' condition assessment and master planning process. The comprehensive analysis will inform a strategic plan. The scope of the process is complete

October 24, 2023

## BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS SUBCOMMITTEE

and the report is taking an extended period of time, but he is hopeful that the team will adhere to the timeline. There will be public feedback and decision points during the process. He believes that the project will be a prudent investment and will pay dividends to the community in the years ahead.

Following Mr. Murphy's overview of the project, **Chair Rojas** opened the floor for questions.

**Member Fantini** thanked Mr. Murphy for the overview. He inquired about internet and phone access in some of the CPSD buildings and the acoustics for theater performances. He shared his desire to create parent/community rooms at the schools that allow for separate access for caregivers. He wondered if the district should consider having 1 or 2 schools devoted to universal preschool, similar to the Somerville model. He also advocated for community use of the district's high-end kitchen facility. Mr. Murphy echoed Member Fantini's sentiment of the importance of community feedback to the success of the project. He noted that the early learning center mode was an example of an important community decision point. He encouraged Member Fantini to remain active throughout the planning process.

**Vice Chair Rachel** enthusiastically supported the idea of community rooms at schools. Community members have inquired about having a list of upcoming major projects. She is curious about the Controlled School Choice policy with respect to programming and capacity. Mr. Murphy shared that specialized programming is currently in the new schools. He agreed that there are questions regarding the potential restriction of programming due to buildings' infrastructures.

**Member Fantini** asked about expanding RSTA offerings to include plumbing and ventilation. Mr. Murphy responded that the CRLS infrastructure was outside of the report's scope.

**Chair Rojas** confirmed that the project under discussion was not a maintenance planning project. He advocated for a separate conversation to address maintenance issues. Mr. Murphy underscored that the report under discussion was focused on capital projects.

**Member Fantini** inquired about landscaping (flowers) at the schools and noted the welcoming environment of Kendall Square office buildings. Mr. Murphy agreed and mentioned potential corporate partnerships for this undertaking.

**Chair Rojas** pivoted the conversation to the second agenda item related to policy changes that may need consideration related to the universal preschool implementation. Mr. Murphy shared the corresponding slide and gave an overview of the Cambridge Preschool Program (CPP) policy implications and decision points. Following his remarks, **Chair Rojas** opened the floor for questions.

**Member Fantini** thanked all involved with the CPP. He stressed the value of the Controlled Choice Policy remaining intact. He shared that parents are worried about others gaming the system. He thought that some would be unhappy if they received their lowest-ranked choice. He noted the Tobin's capacity issues for the Special Start program. He would like review the application and suggested that those involved run scenarios so cracks and loopholes are not missed. Mr. Murphy noted the concern regarding families being foreclosed on opportunities because they do not receive their desired match. He underscored that there will be trade-offs due to the physical space limitations. He underscored that there will be seats available in the kindergarten lottery for fall 2025. A disproportionate number of siblings may impact the availability of seats. CPSD is Seeking to maximize kindergarten capacity. When determining preschool capacity this relates to kindergarten capacity. This process is no different from the current junior kindergarten to kindergarten matriculation process. We are requiring that families accept or reject a match within a timeframe. A student can choose to not attend a CPS preschool program but can still participate in the kindergarten lottery.

**Vice Chair Rachel** asked if the CPP and CPSD matched happen at the same time noting that this could impact families with more than one child. She commented on the CPP ranking system of 6-10 choices

October 24, 2023

**BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS SUBCOMMITTEE**

versus the Controlled Choice system of ranking the top 3 and the ability to join a waiting list if their top 3 were not offered. Mr. Murphy shared that the planning team is having these thoughtful discussions and noted that there is a degree of gaming the system that cannot be avoided without putting up logistical barriers to families. Currently, there no option to reject a placement and be put on a waiting list. He noted that waiting lists could be destabilizing for providers. He underscored that families could commit to a non-CPS option for PreK, but would still be able to join the kindergarten lottery. The goal is to minimize transition and leave open seating for entering kindergarten students. He believes that this is a School Committee policy issue. After January 15 there will be a matching process undertaken by the Bridgecare platform (similar to the CPS lottery systems). The goal is for preschool assignments to be communicated to families on March 1 and families would have 2 weeks to accept or reject the match. He noted that kindergarten assignments take place in February.

**Chair Rojas** inquired about Special Start classes. Mr. Murphy noted that Special Start and preschool would be treated differently as IEP students will be assigned through the OSS. Special Start will continue to be a CPSD integral program. There will be fewer Special Start classes at the Tobin. There will be Special Start classes in more than 7 CPSD schools.

**Chair Rojas** asked about the 10% variance of SES students. Mr. Murphy and the team are still reviewing this process and its implications. We know that we have schools with waitlists for families who qualify for free or reduced lunches. If the variance is increased evenly slightly the waitlists would mostly be gone. Currently, 85% to 95% of families attend one of their first three choices of schools. We hope this will continue to be the case. The problem with applying the variance across the board would result in an under enrollement of SES students in some schools. In addition, some non-SES families would not receive their top choices and there would be unintended consequences of reducing the overall satisfaction across the population. In the coming weeks, Mr. Murphy hopes to have a resolution regarding whether his team will have a recommendation for the School Committee in the coming weeks.

**Chair Rojas** turned the conversation to the CRLS restroom protocols and policies. Mr. Murphy gave an overview of the slide including an increase in gender-inclusive restrooms at CRLS. Chair Rojas asked about his original community question posed at the beginning of the meeting regarding a female student not being allowed by fellow female students to use the girls' bathroom. Mr. Murphy recommended that the student or caregiver should alert administrators. He noted that staff receive training regarding inclusive practices.

**Chair Rojas** thanked Dr. Turk for her contributions to the Buildings and Grounds subcommittee. He closed the meeting at 7:26 p.m.