

November 25, 2024

SCHOOL CLIMATE SUBCOMMITTEE

School Climate Subcommittee
Monday, November 25, 2024 at 5:00 p.m.
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02138

Called for the purpose of discussing school climate with students from CPS upper schools.

Subcommittee Members Present: Rachel Weinstein (Chair); Jose Rojas; David Weinstein

Other Members Present: Vice Chair Caroline Hunter

Also Present: Daniel Coplon Newfield, Principal, VLUS; Manuel Fernandez, Chief Equity Officer; Dr. Karyn Grace, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services; Kim Huffer, Director of SEL; Caitlin O'Brien, Administrative Intern, VLUS; Hermela Shimelis, School Committee Student Member

Upper School Students: Stardom Brown-Blakey, CSUS, 8th Grade; Mariye Demissie, PAUS, 8th Grade; Leilani Goncalves, CSUS, 8th Grade; Sophia Hassan, VLUS, 8th Grade; Hazel Leslie, PAUS, 7th Grade; Sol Estivaliz Liceaga, Amigos, 8th Grade; Clare Lewis, RAUC, 8th grade; Monzer Mhiuldin, RAUC, 8th grade; Royce Toledo, Vassal Lane, 8th grade

Chair Rachel began the meeting at 5:02 p.m. by welcoming the group and reading the call of the meeting.

The Executive Secretary did a roll call of subcommittee members present: Member Rachel, PRESENT; Member Weinstein, PRESENT; Member Rojas, ~~ABSENT~~

Member Rojas joined soon after roll call.

Chair Rachel gave an overview of the agenda and encouraged student participants to share candid feedback. She noted that the subcommittee's focus for the term was CPSD upper schools, largely because the 2023 data outlined that 6th, 7th, and 8th graders were struggling.

Chair Rachel shared the agreements for the meeting:

Agreements & Check-in

- Speak and Listen from the Heart (respect and compassion)
- Share the Air
- Keep Individual Names Private
- Expect and accept non-closure - this is a work in progress (bike rack for other important issues)

Chair Rachel started the discussion with an ice-breaker and asked the following question: If today was a movie and you were the star, what would be the soundtrack/theme song?

Following the ice-breaker, **Chair Rachel** gave the floor to Kim Huffer who led the following slide presentation that can be found on this [website](#).

During her presentation, Ms. Huffer highlighted the following:

- The Teen/Middle-Grades health Survey is a student self-report survey based on the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey.
- 1102 Upper School students completed the survey with an approximately 88% response rate.
- There were statistically significant group-level differences to the following survey questions:

During the past 30 days, how often did you struggle with your mental health? Percentage of students who indicated most of the time or always: Female (56%); Transgender or gender diverse (82%); LGBTQ+ (71%)

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During the past 30 days, how often did you worry about school issues? Percentage of students who indicated fairly often or very often: Female (57%); Transgender or gender diverse (64%)

Percentage of students indicating there is at least one teacher or other adult in school they can talk to if they have a problem. Areas of concern: Asian students (50%), Transgender or gender diverse students (53%) and students in the 7th grade (50%) were least likely to report having a teacher or other adult at school to talk to about a problem.

After the presentation, students shared the feedback on the following questions asked by Ms. Huffer:

What do you, or the students around you mean when you say your mental health isn't good? What does it look and feel like? As adults, what should we notice?

The student shared the following highlights:

- Feeling stressed and not confident
- Overwhelmed with school and sports
- Stressful relationships at home
- Issues outside of school

Students were posed a follow-up question: What are the school issues that you are worried about? Students noted the following:

- Lack of connection with teachers
- Work assignments piling up
- Concerns with grades

Chair Rachel asked what adults can do to help. Students noted the following:

- Teachers being available more after school
- Teachers checking in more
- Respect for students
- Encouraging mental health breaks throughout the day
- Creating a Google form to allow for check-in with teachers
- Being aware that some students may need more help.
- Increased academic resources
- Making WIN block more impactful

The group discussed the impact of the new cell phone policy. Most students felt that the change was a positive one and that students were more focused academically and socially connected to other students. In addition, the group discussed the longer school day and students shared that they were not significantly impacted by this change.

In closing, the adults expressed their appreciation of the student participants. **Chair Rachel** encouraged the students to keep in touch with her and the School Committee.

The meeting was adjourned with by a roll call of subcommittee members: Member Rachel, YAY; Member Weinstein, YAY; Member Rojas, YAY (6:30 p.m.)