

November 6, 2025

SCHOOL CLIMATE SUBCOMMITTEE

School Climate Subcommittee
Thursday, November 6, 2025 at 5:30 p.m.
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02138

Called for the purpose of broadening the circle of community members who know about the Dr. Karen Mapp approach to family engagement and what it could look like in the Cambridge Public Schools.

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

Other Members Present: Elizabeth Hudson; David Weinstein

Also Present: Debbie Bonilla, Family Engagement Specialist; Kim Bostic, Cambridge Families of Color Coalition (CFCC); Manuel Fernandez, Chief Equity Officer; Lissa Galluccio, Family Liaison - Haggerty School; Marguerite Hicks-Gyewu, Family Liaison – Dr. Martin Luther King School; Kim Huffer, Director of SEL; Chad Leith, Chief Accountability Officer; Lauren Morse, Family Liaison – Graham & Parks; Abdel Sepulveda, Principal of Peabody School

Chair Rachel began the meeting at 5:30 p.m. by welcoming the group and reading the call of the meeting.

The Confidential Secretary admitted participants from the waiting room and confirmed everyone is present.

Chair Rachel gave an overview of the agenda which includes an overview of the Dr. Karen Mapp approach to family engagement and its potential implementation in Cambridge Public Schools. She emphasized importance of family engagement in improving student outcomes and mentioned the upcoming hiring of a new position to lead family engagement.

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 and turned the meeting over to Cambridge Families of Color Coalition, Jennifer Betancourt.

Ms. Betancourt introduced Dr. Karen Mapp's vision by sharing her screen and presenting a visual graphic that illustrates the family engagement continuum. The presentation can be found on this [website](#).

Ms. Betancourt highlighted the following:

- Benefits of homeschool partnerships
- Importance of intentional, relational, evidence-based family engagement
- Transition from traditional events to student-centered practices

Chair Rachel turned the meeting over to Dr. Chad Leith who shared the district's efforts and challenges.

Dr. Leith discussed CPS efforts to strengthen family engagement, including Care MAP training for school leaders at Harvard. He highlighted the need to build capacity among school leaders for positive connections with families and caregivers. The district initiated a sequence of training activities emphasizing the importance of family engagement on student performance and belonging. Dr. Leith shared a slide illustrating district goals and the need for ongoing educator support and professional development.

November 6, 2025

SCHOOL CLIMATE SUBCOMMITTEE

Marguerite Hicks-Gweyu described the work of family liaisons, including collaboration with academic coaches, participation in SEL teams, and facilitation of affinity groups. She emphasized support for teachers, coordination of parent-teacher conferences, and parent education programs. Debbie Bonilla shared additional family engagement activities: outreach for events, affinity groups, and community socials to strengthen family-school connections.

The group discussed the following topics:

- Jodi Ekelchik shared concerns about inconsistencies across schools, particularly regarding the length and availability of listening conferences, and highlighted how early, proactive communication from teachers builds trust.
- Abdel Sepulveda explained the challenges of implementing family engagement in schools, including time constraints, the need for ongoing relationships, and the importance of specialist teachers in building intimate relationships with families.
- Lissa Galluccio expresses optimism about the current efforts and the importance of showing families that they are valued and loved.
- Kim Bostic highlights the need for intentionality in family engagement and the importance of building trust and relationships with families.
- Lauren Morse emphasized that family engagement must be part of school improvement plans and shared how clear expectations and regular communication across all educator roles strengthen partnerships.

Chair Rachel opened the floor for public comments. Public comments began with each speaker allotted three minutes, timed by the Confidential Secretary.

The following caregivers, Caitlin Dube, Carroll Magill, Alex Bowers, shared the following sentiments:

- Concerns about how this iteration of the Karen Mapp approach will differ from previous district efforts.
- The value of family liaisons while emphasizing that authentic family engagement requires involvement from all staff, not just designated liaisons.
- Structural challenges at upper schools, where teachers may serve large numbers of students, many below proficiency, creating high demand for direct family communication.
- Meaningful family conferences are extremely difficult without protected time built into the system.
- Stressed that without explicit direction, dedicated time, and compensation from district administration, significant change is unlikely.
- District plans from an earlier Karen Mapp rollout that included defined roles for parents, such as parent panels and strong school council involvement.
- Concerns about whether the current effort will include a formal, ongoing role for parents and caregivers.
- The need for a retrospective review to understand why past family engagement initiatives lost momentum.

November 6, 2025

SCHOOL CLIMATE SUBCOMMITTEE

- The importance of educating and engaging School Councils in family engagement work.
- Supported system-wide sharing of best practices across schools.

Chair Rachel gave space for committee members and administrators to reflect on public comments.

Dr. Leith responded by underscoring intentionality, the need to rethink time and structures, and the importance of leadership accountability. **Member Rojas** highlighted the importance of direct communication with families, consistency across schools, and professional development tied to family engagement expectations. **Member Weinstein** reflected on lessons learned from previous efforts, emphasized the importance of durable systems over individual leadership, and expressed optimism about the district's current trajectory.

Chair Rachel expressed appreciation to the group and concluded the meeting at 7p.m.