

October 5, 2026

COMMUNICATIONS & COMMUNITY RELATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE**Virtual Communications & Community Relations Subcommittee****Monday, October 5, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.****Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio****454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02138**

Called for the purpose of discussing district and Committee communication at the beginning of the 2026-27 school year, including those related to transportation issues and challenges.

Subcommittee Members Present: Member Jaikumar (Co-Chair); Member de Paula Santos (Co-Chair)

Other School Committee Members: Vice Chair Dube

Also Present: Jackie Piques, Director of Communications; Damon Smith, COO

Co-Chair Jaikumar started the meeting at 5:03pm.

Co-Chair Jaikumar opened the floor for public comment. There was no public comment.

Co-Chair Jaikumar discussed transportation concerns during the first several weeks of the school year. Members emphasized the importance of providing families with clear guidance about whom to contact when transportation issues arise.

Director of Communications, Jackie Piques explained that families should contact their school when experiencing transportation concerns. School staff have established relationships with families and can help address questions, provide support, and coordinate with the Transportation Department. She emphasized the need for ongoing communication to reinforce this process.

COO, Damon Smith reported improvements in bus reliability, tracking capabilities, and communication compared with the previous school year, while acknowledging that challenges still remain. Families experiencing problems with bus tracking were encouraged to notify their school so concerns can be collected and addressed. He clarified that families may also copy district transportation staff or himself while keeping the school involved. Mr. Smith identified 12 NRT door-to-door transportation routes experiencing persistent challenges out of 24 total routes. He explained that traffic, loading and unloading, and travel from outside the district can affect reliability. These routes require individualized review and coordination with the transportation provider to determine appropriate adjustments. Ms. Piques described additional outreach to families during the opening days of school, including direct follow-up regarding transportation concerns. Members discussed the importance of communicating kindly and effectively, building trust with families, and encouraging the use of available bus tracking tools.

Members discussed upcoming communication priorities, including the strategic planning process and the Spring Street project. Ms. Piques shared that recent community engagement sessions included student participation at CRLS, virtual breakout discussions, and an in-person session. She noted that outreach would continue as these processes move forward. **Co-Chair de Paula Santos** asked about opportunities for public participation in strategic planning. Ms. Piques explained that the district had gathered feedback from staff, students, families, and caregivers through a survey that received more than 1,000 responses, as well as student focus groups. Future communications would provide updates on the refined mission, measures, and initiatives, followed by broader outreach regarding the draft and final plan.

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Co-Chair Jaikumar asked how lessons learned from community engagement during previous leadership searches could inform future hiring processes. Ms. Piques noted that several recent searches included substantial community participation and the development of leadership profiles. She agreed to bring the question to the Superintendent and leadership team and seek information regarding future engagement opportunities. **Co-Chair de Paula Santos** raised questions regarding communication with families following school or student-related incidents. Ms. Piques explained that communication depends on the circumstances. Schools may communicate with affected classrooms or grade bands and provide resources to support conversations at home. Families with individual concerns should contact their student's teacher and school-based team. She noted that legal requirements may limit information shared with families whose students were not directly involved.

Members discussed ways to make School Committee decisions and meeting outcomes more accessible to the public. **Co-Chair de Paula Santos** suggested improving the School Committee webpage to provide clearer updates. **Co-Chair Jaikumar** revisited the newsletter discussed at the March subcommittee meeting, noting that a concise summary of recent meetings, decisions, and votes could help community members who are unable to review lengthy minutes or recordings. Members discussed the possibility of monthly updates and reviewing the process for establishing this practice.

Co-Chair Jaikumar thanked the group for their participation. **Co-Chair Jaikumar** adjourned the meeting at 6:06 p.m.