October 14, 2026

SCHOOL CLIMATE SUBCOMMITTEE

School Climate Subcommittee
Wednesday, October 14, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02138

Called for the purpose of convening the working group on Chronic Absenteeism.

Subcommittee Members Present: Vice Chair Dube (Co-Chair); Mayor Siddiqui (Co-Chair), Member de Paula Santos

Other Members Present: Member Hudson

Also Present: Kim Huffer, Director of Social Emotional Learning; Leslie Jiménez, Director of Equity, Inclusion and Belonging; Allan Gately Gehant; Principal of CRLS; Melissa Bolden, Director of Family Engagement

Co-Chair Dube began the meeting at 5:01 p.m. by welcoming the group and giving an overview of the agenda.

Co-Chair Dube 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)

Co-Chair Dube opened the meeting by asking attendees to reflect on wins from the start of the school year.

Co-Chair Dube turned the meeting over to Leslie Jiménez**,** who presented on reducing chronic absenteeism in Cambridge Public Schools. The presentation can be found on this website.

During the presentation, Leslie Jiménez highlighted the following:

- The district's chronic absenteeism rate decreased from 22% to 17% at the end of last year
- Data shows improvements across most demographic groups and 14 out of 17 schools or programs within the district
- Current data as of October indicates high absenteeism rates among 12th graders at the high school and 7th graders in upper schools
- The subcommittee is divided into three focused working groups: Process, Family Engagement, and Data

Dr. Jimenez explained that the district's chronic absenteeism working group meets monthly and has organized its work into three areas: processes, family engagement, and data. The group is developing preventative practices, identifying early warning indicators, and aligning tiered interventions with the underlying causes of absences. Its work includes developing a playbook for schools and families, consulting community partners, and reviewing research and effective practices. Melissa Bolden discussed family engagement as a strategy for reducing chronic absenteeism. She described learning from the FAM Institute with Dr. Karen Mapp, attendance-focused professional development, and research emphasizing individualized communication and coordinated supports. She explained that families may underestimate the number of days their children have missed and need clear, timely information about attendance and its connection to learning. The working group is developing communication that helps families understand attendance concerns, identify barriers, and partner with schools on support plans.

Kim Huffer discussed PATH (Personalized Academic and Therapeutic Hub), a new tier three mental health intervention for upper school students modeled after the existing BRYT (Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition) program at CRLS. PATH provides intensive academic and therapeutic support for approximately 12 weeks to help

students transition back to their home communities. **Mayor Siddiqui** requested updates on PATH's effectiveness and emphasized reaching more students who need support.

Principal Gately reviewed changes at CRLS following student, caregiver, and educator feedback on the first year of the no-credit policy. These included automatic attendance warnings through Aspen and clearer attendance codes. "Absence Reported" indicates that a caregiver has reported an absence, but the absence may still count toward the no-credit threshold. "Absence Excused" identifies qualifying absences, such as documented medical appointments, college visits, and religious observances, that do not count toward that threshold. He explained a one-pager was developed to help students and families understand the policy and guidance counselors are conducting targeted outreach, caregiver academy participation increased, and community partnerships are being explored. Dr. Jimenez also reported improved attendance at the High School Extension Program (HSEP), which is piloting an approach to address tardiness.

Co-Chair Dube requested additional information about root causes, seventh-grade attendance by school, and possible transportation barriers. Dr. Jimenez agreed to follow up and explained that the district is developing more consistent data collection. She confirmed that she coordinates the working group and described Bobby Tynes's role in research and coordination. **Member de Paula Santos** asked about supports for students with disabilities and school refusal. Principal Gately described individualized strategies, including home visits and modified schedules. Dr. Jimenez discussed targeted support for students experiencing homelessness and collaboration with out-of-school-time partners.

Co-Chair Dube and Member de Paula Santos raised concerns about ensuring supportive attendance practices and students attending school while sick because of the no-credit policy. **Mayor Siddiqui** asked about translated materials. Principal Gately committed to improving language access and discussed expanding dual enrollment and career and technical education opportunities to strengthen engagement. **Co-Chair Dube** recommended personalized outreach, a menu of available supports, and student participation in the working group.

Co-Chair Dube opened the floor for public comment although there were no sign-ups. The following caregivers and community members—Jess Goetz, Jasper Caravan—shared the following sentiments:

- Inconsistent attendance communication and the need for a clear timeline for improvements and timely notifications to families
- Medical documentation requirements and the need for opportunities for student feedback

Dr. Jimenez explained that school outreach is ongoing while districtwide systems are being strengthened and expressed the working group is scheduled to meet Thursday, October 29th.

Co-Chair Dube thanked the group and adjourned the meeting at 6:30 p.m.