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MEMBERS
LUISA DE PAULA SANTOS
RICHARD HARDING, JR.
ELIZABETH HUDSON
ARJUN JAIKUMAR
MAYOR SUMBUL SIDDIQUI

October 20, 2026

ORDERED:

Referred to the Superintendent:

WHEREAS: On September 2, 2025, the School Committee unanimously voted to amend the District's Student Attendance Policy, to combat chronic absenteeism in the Cambridge Public Schools; and

WHEREAS: The revised Policy states that a student's absence from school because of "personal illness or quarantine" will be considered excused so long as "supporting documentation is provided,"; and

WHEREAS: The revised Policy does not require such supporting documentation to be from a physician or health care provider; and

WHEREAS: In the event of chronic or irregular absences, district policy permits — but does not require — a principal to "request a physician's statement certifying such absences to be justifiable"; and

WHEREAS: The 2026-27 Cambridge Rindge and Latin School ("CRLS") Student Handbook does not include any provision stating that absences because of personal illness or quarantine may be excused with supporting documentation, irrespective of whether that documentation is from a caregiver or from a physician or healthcare provider; and

WHEREAS: Under CRLS's Attendance and No Credit policies and individual course grading systems, accumulation of too many Reported or Unexcused absences may affect a student's grade or result in a student receiving no credit for a course; and

WHEREAS: Financial and physical barriers to healthcare often create inequitable and disparate access to physicians and medical care among the CRLS student population; and

WHEREAS: Students with certain illnesses, particularly communicable or infectious diseases such as COVID-19, are often discouraged from seeing doctors so as to avoid further infection; and

WHEREAS: Certain students have chronic illnesses which can force them to miss school semi-regularly, rather than having a transient illness where they will miss days consecutively, and as such getting a doctor's note is not always possible for them; and

WHEREAS: Students may be incentivized to attend school while sick to avoid academic penalties, further endangering the rest of a school community, especially students with chronic illnesses, who are already particularly vulnerable; and

WHEREAS: The School Committee is committed to addressing the issue of chronic absenteeism without endangering the student population or exacerbating existing inequities; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the Superintendent shall instruct building leadership that a student's absence because of personal illness or quarantine may be counted as an excused absence if a caregiver provides the school with supporting documentation in a timely manner, and that such documentation need not be from a physician; and be it further

RESOLVED: That this policy be effective as of the passage of this Motion; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the change in policy applies retroactively to the beginning of the CRLS 2026-2027 school year; and be it further

RESOLVED: Nothing in this Motion shall be interpreted to amend or alter the district's Student Attendance Policy as amended on September 2, 2025.

Motion #26-229

cc:

Member Jaikumar
Vice Chair Dube
Member de Paula Santos
Member Harding
Member Hudson
Mayor Siddiqui
Chair Weinstein
Superintendent