

March 31, 2026

COMMUNICATIONS & COMMUNITY RELATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE

Virtual Communications & Community Relations Subcommittee

Tuesday, March 31, 2026 at 5:30 p.m.

Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio

454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02138

Called for the purpose of identifying structural barriers to community engagement and evaluating School Committee norms of engagement.

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

Other School Committee Members: Member Hudson

Also Present: Melissa Bolden, Director of Family & Community Engagement; David Murphy, Superintendent of Schools; Karyn Grace, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services; Jackie Piques, Director of Communications

Co-Chair Jaikumar started the meeting at 5:34. **Co-Chair Jaikumar** introduced the new Director of Family & Community Engagement, Melissa Bolden. She shared her background and commitment to family engagement and co-leadership across the district.

Co-Chair Jaikumar opened the floor for public comment. Given the time constraints, each speaker was allotted three minutes. The following caregiver and community member, Anna Shin, shared the following sentiments:

- Supports a School Committee-authored newsletter sent directly to the community
- Cautions against adding new communication channels without improving existing ones (district and school newsletters)
- Identifies School Councils as a key pathway for family engagement
- Notes that School Councils can feel formal, unwelcoming, and at times uncomfortable
- Urges the Committee to strengthen and improve existing engagement structures rather than creating new ones

Members discussed the importance of strengthening communication strategies to better engage families and the broader community. **Co-Chair Jaikumar** proposed the development of a monthly School Committee newsletter from the Chair to summarize recent meetings, decisions, and key updates. Members expressed support for the idea and discussed the potential for creating a student-friendly version to increase accessibility and engagement among students.

Language accessibility was identified as a key priority. The group discussed the need for improved translation and interpretation services, including captioning and more effective communication tools, to ensure all families can fully participate in School Committee processes. They also discussed the importance of balancing communication efforts to ensure information is clear, accessible, and not overwhelming for the community.

The group discussed the need for more immediate and proactive community engagement efforts.

Member Hudson emphasized taking practical steps such as hosting town halls, conducting outreach, and increasing direct communication with families to build stronger relationships.

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Co-Chair Jaikumar led a discussion on improving communication systems, noting that tools such as ParentSquare are primarily used for one-way communication and may need to be enhanced to support more interactive engagement.

Director of Communications, Jackie Piques shared insights from communication surveys, highlighting the high volume of information families receive and the need for more targeted and strategic outreach. She emphasized prioritizing school-to-home communication to strengthen family partnerships.

Community members shared the following sentiments:

- Highlighted the importance of closed captioning and translation features during meetings to better support non-English speaking families
- Emphasized the need for stronger outreach efforts, including direct communication such as phone calls, to build trust with families
- Suggested utilizing multilingual students as interpreters to improve accessibility and increase family engagement
- Discussed the importance of improving language accessibility during meetings, including the use of Zoom captioning and translation tools; it was noted that while these features are available, clearer guidance is needed to ensure community members know how to access them
- Emphasized the need to proactively support families by providing clear instructions and improving communication methods. Suggestions included displaying slides at the beginning of meetings with instructions for enabling captions and translations in multiple languages.
- Discussed strategies to strengthen community engagement, including increasing the availability of forums and holding meetings in more accessible locations across the district

Co-Chair Jaikumar thanked the group for their participation. **Co-Chair Jaikumar** adjourned the meeting at 7:00 p.m.