OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

Sumbul Siddiqui
Mayor (2020-21, 2022-23, 2026-27)

To: Cambridge City Council

From: Sumbul Siddiqui, Mayor

Date: October 29, 2026

Subject: Communicating Information from the School Committee

To the Honorable, the City Council:

I write to provide an updated summary of recent Cambridge School Committee activity.

School Climate Subcommittee (Wednesday, October 14, 2026)

Staff provided updates around reducing chronic absenteeism in Cambridge Public Schools (CPS). Chronic absenteeism is the percentage of students who are absent 10% or more of their total number of student days. A strong relationship exists between chronic absenteeism and lower MCAS performance.

CPS reported a **five-percentage-point reduction** in chronic absenteeism over the past year, from 22% to 17%, with improvements across all student demographic groups and nearly all schools. Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (CRLS) saw the largest improvement, with a 12-percentage-point decline. Year-to-date data show the highest rates among 12th graders (15.4%) and 7th graders (14.1%).

To sustain this progress, CPS is developing a districtwide approach focused on early identification, tiered interventions, family engagement, and data tracking. Planned next steps include creating a playbook for schools and families, improving preventative and proactive communication with families, and using the district's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) platform to track interventions used and assign students a designated staff member for support. The district is also refining its No Credit Policy to provide earlier warnings and better distinguish between reported absences and absences that qualify for exclusion from the policy's threshold.

The subcommittee also received updates on two targeted support programs: bryt (Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition) located at CRLS and the new PATH (Personalized Academic & Therapeutic Hub) program at Darby Vassall Upper School, both designed to support students facing significant challenges returning to or attending school through full time social workers. Additionally, the High School Extension Program (HSEP) reported improved daily attendance and reduced chronic absenteeism and is piloting "Accountability Time," which allows students to make up time missed due to lateness or off-task behavior.

Special Meeting to discuss 158 Spring Street Recommendation (Thursday, October 15, 2026)

The School Committee held a special meeting to discuss the **Superintendent's recommendation to relocate the Amigos School from Upton Street to 158 Spring Street**. Following extensive community engagement and consideration of other potential uses for the site, the Superintendent identified Amigos as the best option aligned with the district's long-term goals, particularly expanding access to high-quality programming for students with high-need designations.

The relocation would allow the district to expand enrollment gradually, increase access to one of its high-performing schools, and provide more equitable learning facilities for students, families, and staff. The school's PK-8 model would also allow the district to make fuller use of the building, including larger classrooms, science labs, an appropriately sized cafeteria, an auditorium, and other community spaces. The Superintendent acknowledged logistical challenges of moving both staff and changing routines for current Amigos families.

The project would involve renovating the existing building, with an estimated capital investment of $14 to $18 million. Priority improvements include HVAC upgrades, window replacements, necessary electrical and plumbing work, improved lighting and corridors, technology infrastructure, and renovations to the cafeteria, auditorium, and lobby. The City of Cambridge would make a significant investment in the campus' athletic and recreational fields.

The Superintendent encouraged the School Committee to continue dedicating time to discussing the other options, including an Early Learning Center and upper school consolidation. For more information around those options and the engagement process, I encourage you to read my previous communication (COF 2026-119). At its October 20 meeting, the School Committee unanimously approved the recommendation to relocate the Amigos School to 158 Spring Street, effective at the start of the 2028–29 school year.

School Committee (Tuesday, October 20, 2026)

Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS): Focus on Math & Science

The Superintendent, the Chief Academic Officer, and the Director of Data, Research & Accountability presented the district's recent accountability data, released in late September. The presentation included a report on MCAS Math and Science results. Discussion around the English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies (Civics) MCAS results can be found in my previous communication (COF 2026-129).

CPS continued to outperform state averages in Math MCAS results across every grade and subject, with all schools exceeding state averages. For the second consecutive year, CPS was among just 37 districts statewide to return to pre-pandemic math achievement levels, with every grade now exceeding 2019 results. **Across Grades 3-8, the district's advantage over the state in math grew from one percentage point in 2017 to 16 points in 2026.** Students demonstrated growth at or above the rate of their academic

peers across the state, with Grade 8 Math showing particularly strong results. Grade 10 Math achievement also reached a historic high, matching pre-pandemic levels despite declining statewide achievement.

Despite these improvements, disparities in achievement and growth persist among student demographic groups. Most groups have returned to or surpassed pre-pandemic achievement levels, **with the exception of low-income students and Black/African American students (Grade 3-8 Math MCAS).** Although all demographic groups demonstrated typical math growth compared with academic peers statewide, growth rates varied. School-level results also reflected differences in student populations and outcomes, underscoring the need to ensure equitable access to strong instruction and timely intervention.

Science results presented a more mixed picture, with Grade 5 and high school achievement declining from 2025, mirroring statewide trends. In response, CPS is reviewing and strengthening science instruction through curriculum alignment, new instructional materials, common assessments, and targeted educator professional development.

Attendance Policy & Illness (Motion 26-229)

This motion stated that absences due to personal illness or quarantine may be excused when a caregiver provides timely supporting documentation – **this documentation does not need to come from a physician**. In response, the Superintendent provided clarity (memo) of existing policy: students receive no academic credit when they accumulate more than 14 unexcused absences in a semester-length class or more than 21 unexcused absences in a year-long class, **regardless of the basis for the absences**.

He acknowledged miscommunication around the need for students to obtain a doctor's note for classes that were missed. **No student is ever required to get a doctor's note, nor is a doctor's note ever a guarantee of an absence being excused.** The School Committee voted to refer the motion to the Superintendent to provide clarity on any discrepancies in attendance policy.

Social Media Use by CRLS Clubs and Athletics (Motion 26-230)

The School Committee discussed a motion to prohibit CRLS athletic teams, clubs, and school-sponsored extracurricular organizations from operating official social media accounts and explore an in-house, district-managed platform that would provide a safe, accessible way for students to share announcements, celebrate achievements, and build community, with student input in its design. The School Committee voted to refer the motion to the Superintendent to assess the feasibility of a student-designed platform and report back with findings and recommendations.

City Council Joint Roundtable with the Cambridge School Committee (Monday, October 26, 2026)

The School Committee met with City Council to discuss the FY28 budget planning process and ongoing macro-economic trends in Cambridge.

Special Meeting to Discuss Superintendent's Goals (Tuesday, October 27, 2026)

The School Committee met to discuss and approve the Superintendent's goals as part of the 2026-27 Superintendent evaluation process. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education requires School Committees to evaluate Superintendents on four categories: instructional leadership, management and operations, family engagement, and professional culture. The School Committee approved the Superintendent's identified key goals:

- **Student Learning**: Elimination/reduction of demographic-based gaps in elementary literacy.
- **Professional Practice**: Empowerment and utilization of district leadership team to ensure greater coherence and effectiveness of central office teams.
- **District Improvement**: (1) Establishment of preferred strategy with respect to CRLS schedule and associated school-based matters; and (2) establishment of more aligned MTSS and behavioral support systems across all schools.
- **Preexisting Workstreams in Fall 2026**:
    - Development/adoption of District Strategic Plan.
    - Resolution of 158 Spring Street and Implementation Thereof.
    - Adoption of Revised Artificial Intelligence Guidance.
    - Completion of Collective Bargaining Agreements Cycle.
- **Associated Workstreams:**
    - Exploration of Cambridge Preschool Program Alignment.
    - Examination/Development of Alternative Education Programming Options for Secondary Students.
    - Development of Strategy to Address Secondary Feeder Pattern Challenges.
    - Examination and recommendations pertaining to usage of time, including school schedules, content exposure and determination of expanded learning time program's future in relation to DHSP after-school programming availability.

Upcoming Dates

As always, please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or requests for additional information. The next regular School Committee meeting will be on Tuesday, November 3, 2026.

Sincerely,



Sumbul Siddiqui
Mayor of Cambridge (2020-21, 2022-23, 2026-27)