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Graham & Parks School Community  
44 Linnaean St  
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Dear Graham & Parks School Community:

I hope this finds you well and enjoying the final days of a restful summer vacation. With my appointment as interim superintendent of the Cambridge Public Schools in late June, I have had the honor of helping our school leaders prepare for what I believe will be a successful 2024 - 2025 school year. During that process, I have learned more about the pressing priorities and issues facing each of our schools, including the Graham & Parks Elementary School.

As you are likely aware, during the 2023 - 2024 school year, the previous superintendent requested an external investigation into allegations that the principal of the Graham & Parks, Dr. Kathleen Smith, had created a “toxic work environment.” Additional allegations stated that the Cambridge Public Schools conducted an improper hiring process leading to Dr. Smith’s appointment in 2022. In response to this request, in January of 2024 the City of Cambridge (through the city solicitor’s office) retained the law firm of Norris, Murray & Peloquin, LLC to conduct this independent investigation. In the ensuing six months, over 80 individuals were interviewed by the external attorney investigator. Due to the commitment by the Cambridge Public Schools and City of Cambridge to maintain the strict confidentiality of personnel records and information to which all of our employees are legally entitled, I am not at liberty to share the full contents of this report. This confidentiality is critical to the preservation of an employment and educational environment in which highly sensitive matters may be raised and appropriately addressed without concerns over retaliation. However, due to the unusual, and at times inappropriate, extent to which this matter has been discussed publicly, I believe it is in the best interests of the Graham & Parks community for me to communicate the outcome of this investigation.

The independent investigation conducted by the city’s external legal counsel determined that the allegations against Dr. Smith were not substantiated, specifically stating:

*A review of the credible evidence does not support a finding of a toxic workplace. The evidence demonstrates that staff have had a variety of experiences under Dr. Smith’s leadership, some extremely positive, supportive and energizing, and others much less so.*

The investigator further stated that “many of the incidents reported seemed minor in contrast to the reactions they produced.” In addition, the investigator found that internal administrative policies suggested that at least one *additional* reference check should have been completed prior to Dr. Smith’s appointment but that there was no evidence that doing so would have altered the hiring outcome.

In speaking with Dr. Smith, staff at the Graham & Parks, and parents/caregivers whose children attend the school, it is clear to me that the previous school year was a challenging one. I am sincerely and deeply grateful for the dedication exhibited by educators who helped ensure sound and effective teaching learning continued on behalf of children during these challenges. The professionalism of the educators at the Graham & Parks is, in my view, beyond reproach. Dr. Smith has reiterated this point in each of the several conversations I have had with her this summer.

While it is evident that the 2023 - 2024 school year was a difficult one for the Graham & Parks, it is even more apparent that the Cambridge Public Schools has an obligation to help ensure greater support and an improved school climate during the upcoming year. The district's leadership team and I are committed to helping make sure that will be the case. To that end, I have taken the following preliminary steps toward identifying additional supports that we as a school district can provide to the Graham & Parks community during the start of the 2024 - 2025 school year:

- During the first weeks of school, Dr. Smith and I will be meeting with members of the Graham & Parks staff to engage and listen to what specific steps educators feel will help affirm and/or restore the sense of community for which the school has long been known. We will hold a similar town hall type of meeting during the month of September for parents and caregivers.
- I have asked former Cambridge Public Schools Principal and district Director of Family Engagement Robin Harris, who will be serving now as a Special Advisor to the Superintendent, to be based at the Graham & Parks effective the first day of school. Ms. Harris's responsibilities will be focused on facilitating discussions with both staff and families about how to foster a strong school climate that is grounded in equity and driven by data on behalf of Graham & Parks students.
- Ms. Harris and I, along with Dr. Michelle Madera, our Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Schools, will be convening small group discussions both with Graham & Parks staff and parents/caregivers to learn more about their experiences and what systems might be helpful to ensure a constructive and positive school climate.
- A working group of current CPS central office administrators will also be tasked with prioritizing the cultivation of a listening-oriented but student-centered environment at the Graham & Parks consistent with their areas of expertise in curriculum implementation, data-based accountability, and social and emotional wellness.

In our numerous conversations of late, Dr. Smith has made clear how eager she is to lead the Graham & Parks toward greater equity and improved outcomes for students. Her steadfast commitment to the school's children is readily apparent, and I am grateful to her for her willingness to collaborate and strive toward a more inclusive and harmonious period with all stakeholders. Dr. Smith and I both fully understand that successful schools require safe, welcoming affirming environments conducive to learning. They also require the cultivation of a culture in which educators feel valued, respected and supported. This is the culture that we are determined to sustain at the Graham & Parks.

Please see Dr. Smith's communication from earlier today for additional important updates and information related to the start of the new school year. I look forward to meeting and conferring with staff, parents and caregivers in the coming weeks about how CPS can better support your school. Until then, please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions you might have, and please enjoy these fleeting days of summer.

Sincerely,



David Murphy

Interim Superintendent