

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Wednesday, February 23, 2015 – Regular Meeting

7:00 p.m. - Board of Aldermen's Chambers – Somerville City Hall

Members present: Mr. Sweeting, Alderman White, Mr. Roix, Mr. Futrell, Ms. Pitone, Mr. Bockelman, Ms. Normand and Ms. Rafal.

Members absent: Mayor Curtatone

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Adam Sweeting called a Regular Meeting of the School Committee to order in the Board of Aldermen's Chambers at City Hall at 7:02 p.m., with a moment of silence and a salute to the flag of the United States of America. Mr. Sweeting asked for a roll call, the results of which are as follows: - Present – 8 –Sweeting, Roix, Rafal, Pitone, Normand, Bockelman, Futrell, and White and ABSENT – 1 – Curtatone.

I. STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

Mr. Sweeting announced that our Student Representative, Joshua Ojo, who won the distinguished poem prize that the Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration will now present his student report. Mr. Ojo's report included the following:

It's great to be back!

- Multi-cultural Fair is the talk of the town with groups getting ready. No concrete plan yet for when it will be held. We know it will be happening but don't know when/how, etc.
- Students have been participating in a new survey to find out their overall biggest issues at SHS. This survey is helping student council understand student needs and so we are reaching out at lunch and during classes for students to participate. We are also asking for teachers to participate!
- Students are asking about the 4 year science fair requirement. Students would like an optional project (history day, etc.) so that students could boost their grade in a class they need help in. Also, not everyone is a science person.
- Students are also asking about the requirement for varsity athletes to take gym (requirement) – Students feel that they are already participating in more physical activity than they ever would in a gym class and also they feel it hurts their schedules because it prohibits them from taking more desirable electives.
- The newly formed Assembly Committee is up and running and is comprised of students working with teachers and administrators to choose speakers. This shows that the school cares and students appreciate that!

Ms. Rafal announced that the requirement for gym/health is from the state and asked the Superintendent for verification of this. Mr. Pierantozzi confirmed that fact and explained the rules/requirements. The Superintendent also added that we can look into other options. Same is true for Mass Core—requirements have been elevated in an effort to make diplomas equitable across the state and school systems

Mr. Sweeting thanked Mr. Ojo for bringing these issues to our attention.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- February 4, 2015 Regular Meeting minutes

MOTION: Ms. Rafal made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roix, to approve the minutes of February 4, 2015.

The motion was approved via voice vote.

III. REPORT OF SUBCOMMITTEES

A. Rules Management Subcommittee: Jan. 12 (Mr. Roix)

The Rules Management subcommittee met on the second floor of City Hall in the conference room on January 12, 2015 at 6 PM. In attendance were Steve Roix, Christine Rafal, Laura Pitone and Tony Pierantozzi also in attendance were Paul Bockelman Adam Sweeting, Carrie Normand and Dan Futrell. The meeting was called to order at 6 PM.

The listing of items are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair to be discussed at the meeting. Not all items may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law.

We reviewed minor changes to policy JLD Guidance Program that had to do with sentences that indicated our compliance within those policies to statutory nondiscrimination clauses from the Massachusetts Gen. laws recently updated to include gender identity as a specific category along with race, color, sex, religion, disability, sexual orientation or national origin all of which are identified as classifiers upon which we should not and will not discriminate. So that's just a reference that happened to appear in that policy and a couple of other places where we will just be updating to reflect the new wording of the law.

More substantively we passed unanimously and to forward to the full School Committee File GCCD which is The Domestic Violence Leave Policy which codifies our compliance with the new state law that took effect in August 2014. It's a workplace law that gives some additional protections in terms of leaves to employees who are affected by domestic violence. And that was forwarded to the full School Committee at the last meeting in which I failed to give my Rules report but that was the first reading and that will be the second reading tonight so hopefully I will make a motion to either approve or not approve that policy and if there any questions we can discuss that at that time.

Also approved and submitted to the full School Committee revised File JRE which is the Somerville Public Schools Network Acceptable Use Policy for Students. This is this is essentially File IJNDB-A , and it essentially supplants former File JRE which was similar but less robust and less I think up-to-date as File IJNDB-A so logically we completely renamed it just to confuse everyone. But no this is effectively cleanup and merging of redundant policies that results in the network acceptable use policy which covers a wide breadth of topics such as but not limited to email use, cyber bullying, access to student email and other Internet files, System security and resource limits - so again that policy was submitted for first reading at the last meeting and it will be on the agenda later this evening for discussion and possibly voting.

Related to that we also voted to rescind the now completely redundant File IJNDB-A, which is now effectively File JRE.

At this meeting we had a couple of policies on the agenda which we did not take action on at least not to be forwarded to the School Committee yet and they will be on our next Rules Committee agenda and in the interest of keeping this report brief I can I can discuss those that time. And the Rules Management Subcommittee adjourned at 6:50 PM.

And I move to approve the report of the chair of the rules management subcommittee for the January 12, 2015 meeting.

MOTION: Mr. Roix made a motion, seconded by Ms. Rafal, to accept the report of the Chair of the Rules Management Subcommittee for the meeting of January 12, 2015.

The motion was approved via voice vote.

B. School Improvement Plan Presentations:

- January 20, 2015 – Argenziano and Winter Hill
- January 22, 2015 – East Somerville, Capuano, and Healey
- January 29, 2015 – West Somerville, Kennedy and Brown
- February 5, 2015 – Full Circle/Next Wave and Somerville High School

Ms. Normand assumed the Chair as Mr. Sweeting provided his report on the School Improvement Plan presentations.

The School Committee heard the School Improvement Plan presentations from various School Councils as scheduled above. At each meeting, approximately 10-15 members of each council attended. School Improvement Council bodies are mandated by law and charged with developing a School Improvement Plan. School Councils are comprised of teachers, staff, parents, and community members. Councils work throughout the fall to develop the plan. Mr. Sweeting thanked all council members for their commitment. This is a big job done by all volunteers and is really a community building process with members getting down to the nitty-gritty. Thanked the Superintendent for his support of this process. Many districts just present plans to the Superintendent of Schools. In Somerville, the plans go to the Superintendent and School Committee at same time. Mr. Sweeting appreciates this collaboration and transparency.

Mayor Curtatone arrived at 7:20 p.m.

Plans will be posted on school websites. This is a holistic view of the school – from MCAS to growth to whole child. We are not MCAS obsessed! Statistical reports were greatly enhanced by Kenya Avant, our Data Specialist, and it was terrific and helpful to have her at the presentations. Requests were made by each school and these requests will be discussed at the appropriate subcommittee meeting. Most were staffing, facilities, student services, and technology requests. Tomorrow night, we will meet with the PTA's at the Healey School to discuss concerns, etc. that they may have.

Overall, this is a tremendous learning experience and a great way to learn about what is happening in our schools, etc.

Mr. Sweeting looks forward to discussing items this spring in the various subcommittees.

MOTION: Mr. Sweeting made a motion, seconded by Mr. Bockelman, to accept the School Improvement Plans, as presented, pending funding.

The motion was approved via voice vote.

Discussion ensued regarding how these presentation influence the budget process and what is done during the year to follow-up on issues presented at these meetings.

IV. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT

A. District Report

The Superintendent asked Dr. McKay to introduce our guest from Code for America. Dr. McKay introduced Stephanie Hirsch who is the City's liaison for this project. Dr. McKay provided background on Stephanie's various positions in the city and schools (ResiStat, SomerStat, School Data Analyst). Ms. Hirsch reported that the three TFA fellows would be focusing on projects to assist the integrated data project associated with SomerPromise, the Early Childhood Initiative and ways to streamline processes at the Parent Information Center. The fellows, who arrived in Somerville on Super Bowl Sunday—just in time for the beginning of our record-setting snowy winter - stepped up to the podium one at a time and introduced themselves and provided a brief bio:

- Alex Soble – a web developer and coder who has done work for the Chicago Public Schools
- Amir Hadjihabib – a San Francisco designer
- Mari Muraki – a graduate of the University of Chicago and Stanford University with a K-12 educational background

Mayor Curtatone announced that this is a collaborative effort and thanked Denise Taylor for her work on bringing this team to Somerville. The Mayor also thanked the project sponsors, The Boston Foundation, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Microsoft and the taxpayers of the City. Mayor Curtatone looks forward to the final reports and projects.

Discussion ensued relative to confidentiality of records (both HIPA and FERPA compliant) and what the fellows hope to accomplish.

Mr. Sweeting thanked the fellows and Ms. Hirsch for coming tonight and looks forward to December to learn about their final project/product.

Ms. Hirsch thanked the School Committee and City for supporting the many previous data projects which led to CFA coming to Somerville.

The Superintendent deferred to Finance Director Patricia Durette for her report on budget-related matters. Ms. Durette's report included the following:

- The FY16 budget continues development work. Much of what Ms. Durette had prepared to share tonight was already discussed during the School Improvement Plan discussions. Principals and Department Administrators have forward budget info to Ms. Durette and she and her team will look to see if any patterns or similarities exist. Ms. Durette is consolidated this information and will share a document containing this information at next week's Finance & Facilities Meeting on March 4, 2015. Detailed service and supply budgets are being received now. Other areas, including class sections and staffing information are being worked on this week.
- Ms. Durette also continues to look at grant funds and investigating how and if to continue grant-funded initiatives and programs which are funded by grants that have funding ending this year.
- 9c cuts continue to be analyzed.
- Ms. Durette is also finalizing the Summer Program schedule now and will be forwarding this information to the School Committee, Parents/Guardians, and DPW soon

The Superintendent continued his district report:

- Somerville High hosts College and Career Night for 10th and 11th grade students and families – Wednesday, February 25, 6:30-8:30pm. The event begins in the Auditorium and will include a variety of workshops to help students prepare for their transition to college. (Finding Your Dream College, SATs and ACTs, College Affordability, College Application Details, Two-Year Schools, and The World of Work)
- Somerville Summer Camps & Activities Fair. Annual event will be held March 4th, 5:30-7:00pm at the Healey School Gymnasium. Nearly 40 program/ summer camp providers from Somerville and the surrounding community have signed up and will be on hand to provide information about their summer programs. The event is free and open to the public.
- Parent-Teacher Conferences Coming Up:
 - Tuesday, February 24th, 2:45-4:15pm: Winter Hill
 - Thursday, February 26th, 2:45-4:15pm: Healey and West Somerville
 - Tuesday, March 3rd, 2:45-4:15pm: Argenziano
- Superintendent Awards Coming Up:
 - Tuesday, February 24th, 11:45am: NW/FC
 - Wednesday, February 25th, 1:30pm: ESCS
 - Thursday, February 26th, 8:30am: Argenziano
 - Tuesday, March 3rd, 8:45am: West Somerville
 - Tuesday, March 10th, 8:30am: Kennedy
- Somerville High School conducted two Open House and School Tour events on February 5 and 6. There were a total of 44 visitors spread out evenly over the two days.
- At your places tonight, you will see a copy of a memo from Commissioner of Education Mitchell Chester regarding MCAS rescheduling for the spring due to school closings, etc.
- You will also find a memo from Mass Department of Transportation regarding a meeting being held at the Healey School to discuss improving safety at the intersection of Temple Street and Mystic Avenue. Publicity for this event will be handled by the City.

Mr. Sweeting announced that our next items which both have to do with the recent historic snow, will be divided into two categories for purposes of discussion – Snow removal/school closures, etc. and the make-up of days lost due to the snow/closures.

Mayor Curtatone reported on the historic level of snowfall (111million cubic feet) just on the streets alone. Clean-up is ongoing and this snow has been challenging for everyone. The first priority is the health, welfare and safety of our citizens. Care was taken to ensure that streets were cleared sufficiently to allow for emergency vehicles to pass and also to ensure that buildings were safe, primarily with regard to inspecting our roofs to determine that structures were safe given the incredible amount of weight placed on them due to the snowfall. Prior to the roof issue, alternate plans were in the works to provide parking for our school staff, but then the decision was made to keep staff and students out of the buildings until the building safety could be assured. These have been difficult times for all in extraordinary circumstances. We hope there will be no more significant snow (one foot or more).

Questions and discussion ensued and included:

- The process for closing schools due to roof danger and why us and not other cities and towns.
- An informational discussion by and with Capital Projects Manager Robert King who explained roof loads, policy development and future systems being put in place for determining the safety of our roofs.
- The possibility of opening individual schools or some, but not all, schools
- Safe passages and building approaches
- Health and safety as the primary concern including crosswalks, sidewalks, students transported out of the district,
- Discussion of whether declaration of a snow emergency, which allows resident parking in school lots immediately impacts the decision to cancel school.

V. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. School Calendars

Mr. Sweeting announced that now we would discuss the second part of the snow discussion – the make-up of canceled days.

- **2014-2015**

At members' seats are the preliminary results of the survey regarding makeup days. The survey closes on this Wednesday at 5:00 p.m. so we will have preliminary discussion this evening but wait until next week to vote on the plan for the making up of lost days.

On the survey for consideration are:

- Good Friday
- April Vacation Week (individual days or the entire week)
- Saturdays later in the year

Points to consider are collective bargaining implications, attendance, financial hardship to people who have travel plans already booked and paid for, minimum attendance requirements, MCAS testing window, the need to determine more than one (1) day of makeup in the event of subsequent storms. The item will be on next Monday night's agenda for action.

- **2015-2016**

Given the possibility of the same situation occurring in future years, we should also revisit the 2015-2016 calendar. Possible changes for consideration are:

- September 1 being a school day, not a PD Day
- October 9 being a school day, not a PD Day
- Election Day (11/3/15) being a school day, not a PD Day
- Good Friday (3/25/16) being a school or PD Day
- September 4 being a school day, not a day off
- Eliminating the February and April vacations and having one vacation in March instead

Discussion took place regarding the historical trend of when the last day of school actually has occurred, collective bargaining impacts, MCAS scheduling

MOTION: Ms. Rafal made a motion, by Mr. Bockelman, to reconsider the 2015-2016 school calendar. The motion was approved via voice vote.

Somerville Public Schools Policy Manual

The following policies were presented for second reading and action this evening:

- File GCCD Domestic Violence Leave, as presented
- File JRE Somerville Public Schools Network Acceptable Use Policy for Students

MOTION: Mr. Roix made a motion, seconded by Ms. Pitone, to approve File GCCD, Domestic Violence Leave Policy, as presented, for inclusion in the Somerville Public Schools Policy Manual.

The motion was approved via voice vote.

MOTION: Mr. Roix made a motion, seconded by Ms. Rafal, to approve File JRE, Somerville Public Schools Network Acceptable Use Policy for Students, as presented, for inclusion in the Somerville Public Schools Policy Manual.

The motion was approved via voice vote.

NEW BUSINESS AGENDA REQUESTS

Ms. Rafal asked that the following be added to future agendas:

At Educational Programs, the Middle Grades Evaluation of 2007

Follow-up on the Student Representative's report regarding the Science Fair, Multi-cultural Fair and Physical Education Requirement

VI. ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS

Ms. Rafal

Thanked the City, DPW, first responders and all others for all of their hard work during the storms, including the shoveling out of fire hydrants, etc.

Ms. Normand

Thanked the Recreation Department for the middle school intramural program. This is a great way for our middle school students to meet kids from around the city and help them meet potential high school classmates and friends before actually getting to the high school.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Prior to adjourning, Ms. Normand expressed the School Committee's condolences for the following relatives of staff members who have recently passed away:

- Beverly Reilly, retired teacher from the Brown School and sister of Joanne Giroux, also a retired teacher from the Brown School.
- Eric Von Riggat, brother of Beverly Sorrentino, retired English teacher from Somerville High School.
- Giles Gardner, father of Jane Gardner, teacher at the Argenziano School.

RELATED DOCUMENTS:

Agenda

Minutes of February 4, 2015

Policies for second reading and action

2014-2015 School Calendar

2015-2016 School Calendar

Two (2) condolence letters

Three (3) donation thank you letters

State Regulations regarding School Day and Structured Learning Time

Memo from Commissioner of Education regarding Update on Extensions and Alternate Schedules for Spring 2015 Testing

Letter from the Mass Department of Transportation regarding safety at the intersection of Temple Street and Mystic Avenue.

Preliminary results of the Somerville Public Schools Makeup Day Poll