

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

Monday, November 21, 2016 – Regular Meeting

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

Members present: Ms. Palmer (7:05), Mr. Roix, Mr. Futrell, Mr. Green, Ms. Normand, and Mayor Curtatone

Members absent: Alderman White, Ms. Pitone

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Carrie Normand called a Regular Meeting of the School Committee to order in the aldermanic chambers at 7:03 p.m., with a moment of silence and a salute to the flag of the United States of America. Ms. Normand asked for a roll call, the results of which are as follows: - Present – 5 –Roix, Futrell, Green, Normand and Curtatone and Absent – 3 –White, Palmer and Pitone.

Ms. Pitone was travelling and Superintendent Skipper was also absent this evening due to illness. Dr. McKay will lead the meeting along with Ms. Normand.

V. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT

A. Presentations:

- Duhamel Education Initiative (DEI) Grant Presentations

Chairman Carrie Normand announced that the next item would be taken out of order and announced that we are blessed to have the crew from DEI as our guests this evening. Ms. Normand asked Duhamel President Larry Siraco to step to the podium to talk about the DEI and this year's awards. Mr. Siraco gave a history of the late Mr. Paul Duhamel and the Organization started to honor his memory and carry on his work of dropout prevention and helping the disenfranchised. He also introduced other members of the Board who were present this evening – Doris McDaniel, Christine Hardy, June Pietrantonio, Janice Siraco, and Alba and Costa Chitouris. Tonight, there were nine (9) awards presented to the following staff members. One award was given in memory of Warren T. Bambury, Jr., the son of some of our founding members. Award recipients and projects are as follows:

- Isabelle Barros, School Adjustment Counselor at West Somerville Neighborhood School – Buddy Bench Building
- Traci Small, Guidance Director at Somerville High School – Redirect Affect Regulation Center
- Suzanne Alter, Redirect Counselor at Somerville High School – Redirect Youth Participatory Action Research Projects (Bambury Award Winner)
- Tim Dempsey, Teacher/Counselor at Somerville High School – Collaboration between FC and Parts and Crafts Maker Space
- Maura Mendoza Quiroz, former Parent Liaison at Capuano Early Childhood Center and now employee of the SFLC – Songs Around the World
- Angela Rodriguez, Teacher at Argenziano School – A Classroom Library: The Home-School Link to Reading Growth and a Love for Literacy
- Brittany Williams, teacher at East Somerville Community School – Tablets and RTI: A Small-Group Reading Approach
- Sheila Freitas Haley, District Supervisor of Attendance – Attendance Madness
- David Aronofsky, Teacher/Counselor at Next Wave/Full Circle – Ropes Course

Mr. Roix thanked the DEI group for attending and providing these grants to this group of hardworking staff members. It is wonderful to acknowledge people who go the extra mile for our students. Their work is truly "where the rubber hits the road."

The meeting recessed at 7:22 p.m. so that members could speak with our guests.

The meeting resumed at 7:32 p.m.

II. STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL - Our Student Representative, Dessources Domond, was not in attendance this evening.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. November 7, 2016 Regular Minutes

MOTION: Mr. Green made a motion, seconded by Mr. Futrell to approve the minutes. The motion was approved via voice vote.

IV. REPORT OF SUBCOMMITTEE**A. School Committee Meeting for Personnel:** Oct. 26 (Ms. Pitone)

Ms. Pitone was not in attendance this evening as she was traveling for the Thanksgiving holiday. Her report will be given at our next meeting.

B. MASC Conference and Resolutions Committee: Nov. 2-4 (Mr. Futrell)

The Massachusetts Association of School Committees held its annual conference in Hyannis from Nov 2 - Nov 5. This association advocates on behalf of the interests of all school districts in the Commonwealth representing over 300 cities and towns.

Each year, the association presents resolutions to its membership that guide specific advocacy work for the following year. Of note, the MASC will often take positions on issues that are state level issues that directly or indirectly affect school districts.

This year, there were 4 resolutions up for discussion before the association and I was selected to represent this body as a delegate, voting on behalf of our district's interests. As has been the norm, this body did not bind me to any particular vote because often in the deliberation of each resolution, the spirit or the substance of that resolution may be changed from its initial proposal in a way that would change our districts position.

Resolution 1 calls upon the legislature to enact the recommendations of the Foundation Budget, which has been historically funded around 40%, into law. On behalf of Somerville, I voted yes, as did the majority of delegates. Resolution 1 passed unanimously with little discussion.

Resolution 2 asks the MASC to explore ways to promote social and economic equity through ballot initiative on tax reform that would seek additional revenue from the state's wealthiest residents, in order to secure a stronger financial base for education.

There was passionate discussion on this topic, with some school committee members across the state expressing that it wasn't the role of school committees to have an opinion on the tax structure in the commonwealth. Others took exception to the progressive taxation represented in this measure, that would target only the wealthiest for increased revenue.

On the other side of the discussion, one member noted that we are one of the only associations related to education that has yet to back this proposal. Others expressed support for funding quality education for all of our children, describing our current system as "not trickling down" to those in need. New Bedford in particular noted that nobody gets enough money from the state, that there is systematic underfunding even under the state's own formula, and that we need to push the legislature to close the gap.

On behalf of Somerville, I voted yes. Resolution passed on a counted vote of 67-41.

Resolution 3 asks the MASC to urge voters to reject any ballot initiatives to raise the charter cap (of note, this meeting was 6 days before the election), and seeks legislative approval for charter school reforms that include demographic guidelines so that charters are required to demographically represent their communities, to report numbers of students who leave charters and are returned to public districts, and asking the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to retain and report on enrollment of special education students in charter schools.

There was a mostly one sided discussion on this issue, with members discussing problems with funding of charter schools, their efficacy in supporting our most vulnerable students, and specifically on their impact to ELL students.

On behalf of Somerville, I voted yes. The delegation adopted this resolution overwhelmingly by a show of hands, no count needed.

Resolution 4 asks the MASC to allocate resources to identify strategies and improves awareness of the importance of social and emotional learning, an issue we're already a couple years ahead of the state on. This resolution additionally asks the MASC to work with behavioral and health care providers and to support public policy initiatives that prioritize SEL for all children.

This resolution received little discussion as there was absolutely no conflict. On behalf of Somerville, I voted yes and this resolution was passed unanimously with no count needed.

I'd like to thank this body for trusting me to represent our district in this conversation that spans our state, and I'm very happy to report that the delegation representing all districts across the Commonwealth voted in line with the Somerville vote on all resolutions.

C. Rules Management Subcommittee: Nov. 7 (Mr. Futrell)

The Rules subcommittee meeting of Nov 7 began at 6:05.

In attendance were: myself, Mr. Roix, Ms. Palmer, and Dr. McKay.

In the audience were 7 parents.

On the agenda was a review of our policy on therapy dogs, and a review of our homework policy.

Dr. McKay talked the subcommittee through a draft of changes to policy IMG on therapy animals and requested our input. We discussed verification of the status of service animals and the different kinds of support those animals can provide. The Assistant Superintendent agreed to come back to the Rules subcommittee with additional detail in the future.

Moving on to our homework policy File IKB, we had five parents in the audience who shared a spectrum of views on the subject. A couple quotes from the parents in attendance:

"Homework gives parents an opportunity to see what their kids are doing."

"Homework has the potential to bleed the love of learning out."

A parent "would rather suggestions of creative or play based ways to practice skills" than assigned homework through 2nd grade.

One parent spoke about a parent teacher conference in which a new teacher referenced the suggested homework times in our district policy as rules to follow rather than a suggestion, and felt that maybe that teacher wasn't empowered to apply her own judgment.

Another parent noted research that homework doesn't positively impact the achievement gap, that kids who do homework don't need it, and kids who need it don't do it. She also noted the potential for homework to put parents in conflict with teachers.

We also talked about the role of a homework policy in the district, noting that some districts have a single sentence homework policy and others are more prescriptive. We all agreed that homework assignments fall into the professional realm of teachers, and that we'd like to better clarify the role of homework so that it fully supports differentiated and high quality learning across the district.

The district will be convening a working group on the topic that will incorporate feedback from parents, and will report back to the School Committee in the spring.

We adjourned the meeting at 7:02.

MOTION: Mr. Futrell made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roix, to accept the report of the Chair of the Rules Management Subcommittee for the meeting of November 7, 2016.

The motion was approved via voice vote.

D. Finance & Facilities Subcommittee: Nov. 15 (Mr. Futrell)

The Finance subcommittee meeting of Nov 15 began at 6:32.

In attendance were myself, Ms. Pitone, and Dr. McKay, Finance Director Gordon; as well as Commissioner Koty and Mr. Bowler from the Department of Public Works.

On the agenda was a review of facilities work in the district, review of expenditures and bill rolls, and discussion on transportation within the district.

Facilities

- Commissioner Koty reviewed the series of improvements to the Edgerly, as well as gym floor renovation at the Healey, West, and Edgerly planned for 2017. This includes sanding, re-taping, and refinishing.
- Additionally, the district is adding a modest fitness room in the Edgerly that will be available for all district employees.
- Lastly, Mr. Koty talked through our air quality measures in relation to a question about Radon. He noted that all filters are replaced every 6 months, that the building department inspects all buildings every 12 months, and the fire dept. inspects every building every 24 months. Air quality is not a major concern and if any parent requests a test, DPW has and will do so immediately.

Expenditures and Bill Rolls

- There has been a lot of discussion lately about the impact to our federal funds with our president elect, who has vowed to withhold federal funding from sanctuary cities. As a note, Somerville is a sanctuary city, which means that we will not forcibly detain undocumented immigrants who have otherwise broken no laws for arrest and deportation by federal agencies. We are thankful that our Mayor has taken a strong stand on this issue in the last week, saying repeatedly that the city will stand with our immigrant communities that contribute so much to our culture and our history. At our next finance subcommittee meeting, we'll take a deep dive into the parts of our budget that rely on federal funding.
- We discussed variances from budgeted amounts that were +/- 10%, and the subcommittee asked several questions on topics including revolving accounts, and building supply expenses, among other things.
- Ms. Pitone moved and I seconded to approve the Bill rolls, which passed unanimously.

Transportation

- The district currently provides 3 bus routes for ELL students, totaling between 185-195 students.
- Additionally, the district buses students for specific Special Ed programs that exist at particular schools, as required by student IEPs.
- Since this was the last item on the agenda, we didn't get to discuss this fully and so will include this in a future agenda, specifically discussion to clarify the current state of bussing for Unidos students.

The subcommittee adjourned at 7:35pm.

MOTION: Mr. Futrell made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roix, to approve the FY16 Bill Rolls.
The motion was approved via voice vote.

MOTION: Mr. Futrell made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roix, to accept the report of the Chair of the Finance & Facilities Subcommittee for the meeting of November 15, 2016.

E. Educational Programs and Instruction Subcommittee: Nov. 15 (Mr. Roix)

Members present: Steve Roix, Laura Pitone

Staff present: Vince McKay, Holly Hatch, Jill Geiser, Karen Woods, Steve Simolaris and Kristen Seyfried

Others present: Justin Hauver and Melanie McLaughlin of the RIDES project

1 member of the public (Ward 2 SC rep. Dan Futrell)

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 p.m.

- The first item was a presentation from the RIDES project Team leaders
 - RIDES is an acronym for ReImagining Integration: Diverse and Equitable Schools, a project of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, which is partnering with various school districts and schools throughout the country to *find ways to help increase the number and quality of the settings where "our children can learn together" so "our people [can] learn to live together."*
 - Justin Hauver and Melanie McLaughlin - graduate students of Lee Teitel, the initiator of the RIDES project, are acting as facilitators and coaches for the project teams here in Somerville. They gave us a brief history and overview of the program.
 - ESCS and the Healey School are participating directly in the project
 - So, the presentation included ESCS principal Dr. Holly Hatch and Healey School principal Dr. Jill Geiser who are leading the project teams at each school, as well as meeting together as a District group with both teams, *for discussions on race in education and what it means in our schools, what quality integration looks like and hopefully a roadmap*
 - PowerPoint?
 - goals?
 - long-term?
 - Our own colleague Andre Green is representing the School Committee on the District project team - *I should note that Mr. Green is also on the Educational Programs subcommittee and certainly wanted to be there for this meeting - I had to reschedule this meeting from the original date to avoid a building committee commitment the night before, and Mr. Green was unable to make the new date because of a commitment he had, so I apologize to him again; but we appreciate his work on this project team and we look forward to getting more updates from the RIDES team as the school year progresses.*
- Next was a presentation from Karen Woods, Director of Educator Development,

- New position just created this year, *which is designed to focus on the ways we help educators in the District develop/grow/improve, really an important component of School Committee goal #6.*
- Ms. Woods presented her vision for her new role, now that she's been in the role full time for a few months: what she's done, what she's learned, and what she plans for the future.
- *A very informative presentation with regard to using the educator evaluation process, which is mandated, but I would say she has a focus on how we can leverage it as a positive tool for educator development rather than just as an annoying exercise in extra paperwork, and that involves creating a shared vision, between educators at every level of our district, of how the evaluation process can be used to be support ALL of our teachers, to improve teaching and learning across the district, and also more granularly - identify particularly high performing teachers who may be strong candidates for leadership positions, so that we can improve our development of our own "home grown" talent, so to speak; and also to identify school and grade level strengths and weaknesses to inform future professional development planning decisions.*
- *Ms. Woods has done a ton of work already, starting last spring before she even was in this position full time tons of meetings with supervisors, groups of educators, monthly meetings with the joint study team, and she clearly has a great passion for this work and has really taken the initiative.,*
- *In my opinion, she's given us hope that this position was a good investment that will pay real dividends for the District going forward -*
- *and we thank her for her continued work and for the update.*
- Last but not least was an update from our Supervisor of Health, Wellness and Physical Education Steve Simolaris,
 - *We were pleased that Mr. Simolaris brought with him our new full-time middle grades health educator, Kristin Seyfried.*
 - Mr. Simolaris and Ms. Seyfried gave us an update on the revamped Middle School health curriculum, particularly focusing on two critical areas identified as important to our community - those being
 - substance abuse prevention and
 - sexual health.
 - Ms. Seyfried *comes to us with expertise as an experienced middle school health educator having worked in that capacity both in Cambridge and Waltham, both she and Mr. Simolaris spent time with the subcommittee outlining the curriculum being used, which should be pointed out is evidence based and aligned to state standards; as well as national recommendations and best practices in these areas.*
 - These topics are outlined in a letter going home to parents of **4th through 8th graders**
 - The letter gives an overview of the health topics covered in those grades, and also,
 - instructions for parents who choose to "opt-out" of any of the health curriculum presented.
 - So we thank Mr. Simolaris and Ms. Seyfried for the informative update and look forward to hearing from them in the future.
- Lastly we approved the minutes for the October Educational Programs subcommittee meeting.
- Meeting adjourned at approximately 9:15.

MOTION: Mr. Roix made a motion, seconded by Ms. Palmer, to accept the report of the Chair of the Educational Programs and Instruction Subcommittee for the meeting of November 15, 2016.

The motion was approved via voice vote.

V. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT

B. Personnel Report

Dr. McKay reported on the Personnel Report that was included in members packets this week. Retirements were reviewed and one was highlighted – that of Maura Dickerson, a paraprofessional from the Capuano Early Childhood Center, after 10 years. Dr. McKay also provided a brief overview of the numbers of resignations, leaves of absences and new hires.

C. District Report

Before Dr. McKay presented the district notes tonight, he took a few minutes to address a topic that is at the forefront of most people's minds these days -- the post presidential-election climate -- and to reaffirm our commitment to **every** member of our community. It's fair to say that this election cycle and the results of the election have generated a great deal of dialogue, anxiety and concern in communities across the country; particularly communities that value and embrace the type of rich diversity that makes Somerville so special, and which connects us to the world around us.

On November 10th, Superintendent Skipper shared the following message with parents, guardians and staff members, ensuring them that we will not waver in our commitment to, and respect for, **every single member** of our community. Dr. McKay shared that message in an attempt to reassure the viewing audience that our work to continue providing a safe, welcoming, and supportive community for everyone in our city remains our priority.

Mrs. Skipper's message to families on November 10th read as follows:

"As adults, we sometimes forget that our children live in a world and face issues much more complex than the world we grew up in or the issues we faced. The internet, social media, and 24/7 media coverage of events present a complexity and create a level of stress that even we as adults struggle to navigate and manage successfully.

This year leading up to Tuesday's presidential election was particularly stressful and polarizing for both adults and students, and reactions to the 2016 election results, as evidenced in our schools all day yesterday, have created strong emotions among both adults and children. Our role as educators is foremost to support all of our students, to help them feel safe, and to provide an opportunity for learning and growth through our daily interactions with them, regardless of the topic. By helping students understand the electoral process, validating students' personal reactions to what they may be seeing and hearing happening around them and on social media about the election, and reassuring them of our commitment to include and respect every member of this community, we hope to alleviate some of the anxiety that navigating these complex issues and feelings has caused.

The City of Somerville and the Somerville Public Schools will continue our commitment to our students and families to focus on the tenets that have made Somerville such an exceptional community – embracing diversity and the richness that it brings to our community, working collaboratively to understand and resolve problems and differences, respecting and celebrating those differences, and pushing the boundaries of what we know is possible to make sure that all of our children can feel safe and be successful academically, socially, and emotionally.

We encourage our students to share their concerns or questions with their school counselor. Counselors were available yesterday and today, and will be available next week as well."

We will continue to work with partners across the city to provide the support that students and families need. Discussions and planning are well under way to ensure that the foundation upon which our great city has been built is not jeopardized, and that the values of kindness, inclusion, and human decency remain at the forefront of our decision-making.

- A reminder that it's National Family Literacy Month. We hope you'll make time this Thanksgiving weekend to enjoy **StoryWalks** located across the City with your young children. StoryWalks are a fun, educational activity that places a children's story along a popular walking route in the community. You can find them at Foss Park, the Cummings playground, Capuano playground, Hodgkins Park, and the Central Library playground.
- The Somerville High School Track PAC also invites you to take care of your holiday shopping this weekend at their **25th Annual Holiday Arts and Crafts Fair** on Saturday, November 26th, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the SHS Field House. More than 100 crafters from around New England will be selling their wares. The Track PAC supports and encourages Somerville High track and cross country athletes, and provides more than \$6,000 in annual scholarships to graduating seniors.
- The annual **Somerville Hour of Code** event is coming up! There's still time to volunteer to help students throughout the district in experiencing the thrill of computer programming between December 5th and December 11th. No coding experience is required to volunteer. Every student in our district will have the chance to learn the basics of computer science during this week-long event. We hope you'll join us. You can register to volunteer at somervillehoc.weebly.com.
- Speaking of volunteering, our district Volunteer Coordinator Jen Capuano will be hosting a **"Serve & Inspire" Volunteer Orientation** on Thursday, December 1st, from 6:30-8:30pm at the East Somerville Community School. We invite you to join us and learn how you can be part of a great teaching and learning community at the Somerville Public Schools. Please join us, or contact Jen at jcapuano@k12.somerville.ma.us if you have questions regarding volunteer opportunities in our district.
- The annual **Christmas Tree Fundraiser** hosted by Next Wave/Full Circle takes place December 2nd through 18th at Foss Park. You can purchase your holiday tree and support a great cause. Proceeds from tree sales help fund scholarships, special programs and events for Next Wave and Full Circle students. Visit

the NW/FC website home page and watch the student-produced Tree Lot video to learn more. The Tree Lot will be open from 4-8 p.m. on weekdays and from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on weekends.

- **Parent-Teacher Conferences** will continue through early December.
 - Tuesday, November 29, 6-7:30pm: Argenziano School Conferences
 - Wednesday, November 30, 6-7:30pm: Capuano Early Childhood Center
 - Thursday, December 1, 5:45-8:00pm: Brown School Conferences
 - Thursday, December 1, 6-7:30pm: ESCS Conferences
 - Thursday, December 1, 6-7:30pm: Winter Hill School Conferences
- I look forward to celebrating students across the district at the upcoming **Student of the Quarter** awards ceremonies.
 - Earlier today from 12:30-1:30pm: Next Wave
 - Also today from 1:30-2:30pm: East Somerville Community School
 - Tuesday, Nov. 22nd at 8:30am: Healey School
 - Tuesday, Nov. 22nd at 1:30pm: Brown School
 - Monday, Nov. 28th at 8:30am: Winter Hill School
 - Tuesday, Nov. 29th at 8:45am: West Somerville Neighborhood School
 - Wednesday, Nov. 20th at 8:30am: Kennedy School
 - Thursday, Dec. 8th at 8:30am: Argenziano School
- Finally, a reminder that **Thanksgiving Recess** begins at noon on Wednesday, November 23rd. All students will be dismissed at noon on Wednesday. All schools and district offices will be closed for Thanksgiving break on Thursday and Friday, November 24th and 25th.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Acceptance of Donation (recommended action: approval)

The Superintendent recommends the acceptance, with gratitude, of the following donation:

Donation	Donor	City, State	Value	Program donated to
Photography Equipment	Naomi Inasi	Medford, MA	\$300.00	SHS Photography Art Program

MOTION: Mayor Curtatone made a motion, seconded by Mr. Green, to accept the donation, with gratitude. The motion was approved via voice vote.

VII. ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS

Mr. Roix

1. Provided a brief SHS Building Committee update. Gave information on the interviews for the Construction Manager of the project and the interview committee's choice, which was Suffolk Construction. Suffolk will be the Construction Manager once successful negotiations have been completed. Once hired, they will fine-tune the project estimate. The Schematic Design of the project is due to the MSBA in time for them to place it on their February meeting agenda. The two finalists chosen by the committee were both great. John Oteri and Leo DeSimone were both great choices. We couldn't lose with either of them.
 - Ms. Normand thanked Mr. Roix for his report and for the numerous hours he dedicates to representing the School Committee on the Building Committee.
 - Mayor Curtatone thanked the committee members and reported that there were four very viable firms in the mix. He also thanked the voters of Somerville for supporting the ballot question to fund the project. 75% of the voters were in favor of the debt reduction override. We are committed to getting the project done on time. Lots of work to be done by February. Now the Board of Aldermen can get to work on the borrowing for this legacy project.

Ms. Palmer

1. Provided an update on the Backpack Program. Currently there are 222 participants, that's an increase of 51 over last year. The program serves families from all schools. They have provided 7,828 meals with 1,776 provided last weekend. This project is overseen by a group made entirely of volunteers.

Mr. Green

1. Mr. Green asked about possibly adding funds for food for weekends to the next budget.
2. Asked about an update on the fields issue. This was discussed back in May at a Finance and Facilities meeting and an update was expected in the fall. Mr. Futrell responded that he will add this item onto a future Finance agenda.
3. Also requested a response to a request he made at a Regular meeting a few weeks ago regarding task forces, committees, etc.

Mayor Curtatone

1. Happy Thanksgiving to all.
2. Please come to the Fall Sports Rally in the High School fieldhouse on Wednesday morning.
3. The annual Thanksgiving football game against Cambridge will be held at Dilboy on Wednesday night, this year. This is the annual battle for the "picket fence"!
 - Ms. Normand gave a shout out on the football game!
 - Mr. Green asked about the time and location of the rally. It is at 10:00 Wednesday morning in the fieldhouse.

Mr. Futrell

1. Reminded School Committee members that the Superintendent's evaluation document is a public document and suggested people be mindful of this when providing input.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:19 p.m. via voice vote.

RELATED DOCUMENTS:

1. Agenda
2. Minutes of November 7, 2016 for approval
3. One (1) Overnight Field Trip form for approval
4. One (1) Donation Acceptance form
5. Two (2) Condolence letters
6. One (1) donation thank you letter
7. One (1) thank you letter from a staff member for remembering her family member at a recent meeting