



Construction Advisory Group SPS Report

*School Committee Meeting
June 9, 2025*

Background and Scope

The Somerville School Construction Advisory Group (“CAG”) is tasked with providing recommendations on the location and scope of the new Winter Hill Community Innovation School, which will be considered by Mayor Ballantyne. The Advisory Group will develop a recommendation on whether the project scope should focus solely on the Winter Hill School or if it should also include the Benjamin G. Brown School, and where a new school should be located.

- ❖ This presentation will explore several considerations raised by the CAG from the perspective of the District.
- ❖ Consistent with the community process outlined by the Mayor, this presentation will not provide a definitive recommendation as to the two questions before the CAG.
- ❖ We hope this presentation will serve as pertinent information to support the CAG in making its final recommendation to the Mayor.

Research Questions

Diverse Programming



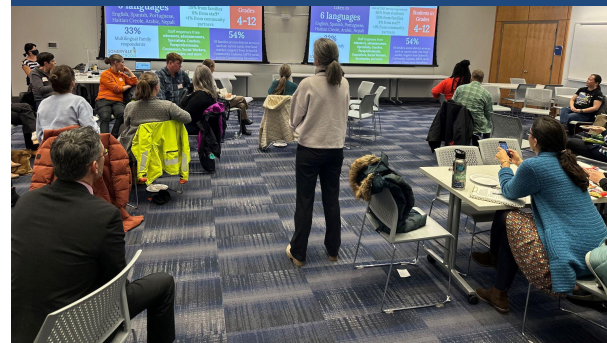
Distance From School



School Size



Facility Features: Large Gathering Spaces



Diversity: Specialized Programming

How does exposure to diverse peer groups through specialized programming (e.g. MLE, SpEd, SEL) impact learning and outcomes?

Increasing student diversity may slightly benefit other learners if the increase is adequately supported (e.g., adequate staffing, inclusive learning practices).

Inclusive educational practices have shown positive academic effects for students w/out special education needs.

More diverse schools can reduce prejudice & enhance empathy.

W/out support more diversity may hamper instructional pace, cause disruption, reduce sense of belonging, and cause resource dilution.

These costs may negatively impact outcomes for all learners, including those without specialized educational needs.

The potential benefits and costs of diversity will depend on school integration at the classrooms level.

The current Brown School facility does not have space capacity for any of our specialized programs

Distance from School

How does attending a school in one's immediate neighborhood versus traveling farther impact student outcomes?

The impact of distance from school and student outcomes is impacted by many factors and hard to study.

In urban settings, students often travel longer distances for higher-quality schools. In rural settings, distance is often linked to poverty.

The impacts of increased distance are relatively minor

Most likely leading to decreased attendance, sense of belonging, and family engagement

Based on the relatively minor impact that school consolidation would have on commute time, the increased distance under consideration is unlikely to affect student outcomes.

Depending on the final decision, students will need to travel slightly further.

School Size

How does school size, i.e. attending a large school vs. a small school impact outcomes?

Outcomes peak for mid-sized K-8 schools (~400-700 stds.) while very small or especially large enrollments erode benefits.

Larger schools leverage scale to host full-time specialists/broader menu of programs (e.g., ASD classrooms or language tracks). Smaller schools often share itinerant staff and rely on inclusive co teaching.

Academically, smaller schools match or outperform larger ones, esp. for low-income and high-need stds., b/c staff can give individualized attention & maintain high expectations. Gains flatten/reverse once K-8 schools surpass roughly 700 students.

Non-academic indicators—including safety, attendance, engagement, and extracurricular participation—fav or smaller schools, which cultivate tighter peer networks, lower bullying, and quicker adult intervention when problems arise.

Many neurodivergent learners thrive in the calmer, more predictable climate of smaller schools, whose lower ratios and flexible routines reduce sensory overload and support individualized plans.

Districts often pursue a “best-of-both” strategy, keeping overall enrollment in the mid-hundreds to balance personalized learning, positive climate, fiscal efficiency, and sufficient capacity for specialized services.

Facility Features: Gathering Spaces

What impact do facility features that allow large gathering spaces (e.g. auditoriums, gyms, play structures) have on student outcomes and overall school experiences?

Actively-used gyms, playgrounds, and auditoriums can boost academics, behavior, and engagement.

Daily, well-supervised physical-activity time in gyms or safe play areas are associated with small gains in attention, conduct, and test scores. Arts and assembly spaces similarly lift creativity, morale, and family turnout. Effects fade when access is limited.

These facilities can also host after-school and summer programs that raise grades and curb risky behavior for low-income students—provided the programs are high-quality and well staffed.

Large communal rooms deepen family engagement, a key driver of attendance and achievement, yet upkeep costs and equitable access can be hurdles.

Schools without dedicated spaces can still partner with parks or community centers and use portable equipment or staggered schedules to create flexible activity zones.

Overall, Somerville can expect some academic and social benefits from multipurpose spaces if they remain actively programmed, inclusively scheduled, and properly resourced.

Key Takeaways

Diversity: Specialized programming

- ❖ Increasing student diversity linked to **specialized programming may benefit other learners** if the increase is adequately supported (e.g., adequate staffing, inclusive learning practices).

Distance from School

- ❖ Based on the relatively minor impact that school consolidation would have on commute time, the **increased distance** under consideration is **unlikely to affect student outcomes**.

School Size

- ❖ Academically, **smaller schools match or outperform larger ones**, esp. for low-income and high-need stds., b/c staff can give individualized attention & maintain high expectations. Gains flatten/reverse once K-8 schools surpass roughly 700 stds.
- ❖ Non-academic indicators (incl. safety, attendance, engagement, and extracurriculars) favor smaller schools, which **cultivate tighter peer networks, lower bullying, and expedite adult intervention** when needed.
- ❖ Larger schools leverage scale to host full-time specialists/broader menu of programs. Smaller schools often share itinerant staff and rely on inclusive co-teaching.

Facility Features: Large Gathering Spaces

- ❖ **Actively used gyms**, playgrounds, and auditoriums can **boost academics, behavior, and engagement**.
- ❖ Large communal rooms deepen family engagement, a key driver of attendance and achievement, yet upkeep costs and equitable access can be hurdles.
- ❖ Overall, Somerville can expect some **academic and social benefits from multipurpose spaces** if they remain actively programmed, inclusively scheduled, and properly resourced.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements

Thank you to **Samuel T. Moulton, PhD**, Former Senior Director of Data Science and Applied Research at Panorama Education, for your expertise, research and analysis. Also, thank you to the members of the Construction Advisory Group for your thoughtful engagement throughout this process.

Staff Acknowledgements

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Samantha Eligene, Director of Data and Accountability

Danielle Barry, Facilities, Safety and Transportation Coordinator

Thank you!



Appendix: Citations

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