

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**Monday, February 24, 2020 - Regular Meeting**

7:00 p.m. – City Council Chambers– City Hall

**Members present:** Ms. Krepchin, Ms. Barish, Ms. Normand, Ms. Pitone, Dr. Phillips, Mayor Curtatone and President McLaughlin.

**Members absent:** Dr. Ackman, Mr. Green.

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Normand called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. with a moment of silence followed by a salute to the flag of the United States of America.

Chair Normand asked Ms. Santiago to call the roll, results of which were as follows: PRESENT – 7 – Ms. Krepchin, Ms. Pitone, Ms. Barish, Ms. Normand, Dr. Phillips, Mayor Curtatone and Mr. McLaughlin ABSENT – 2 - Dr. Ackman, Mr. Green.

Chair Normand made an attempt at the beginning of this meeting to make a statement letting the public know that she would be allowing nonresidents who signed up for public comments to speak and to also announce that Superintendent Skipper was not in attendance due to having had surgery, Dr. Ackman sprained her ankle and Mr. Green had a family emergency. She also announced that the Mayor would arrive at or around 7:30 p.m.

The STA Unit C is currently in negotiations with the Somerville School Committee, in an attempt to have their demands met they attended this Regular meeting of the School Committee to protest. Before the meeting began the Main Conference room at the Edgerly building was filled with Paraprofessionals, Teachers and city residents. Several of them had bull horns and they were all chanting phrases like "what do we want? Contracts! When do we want them? Now!". Chants such as this one continued throughout the entire meeting, even during the time of the moment of silence and salute to the flag the chants did not stop. Ultimately the STA took over the meeting with the protest and most of the items listed on the agenda were tabled; including the School Improvement Plans for which staff from the Brown School and Capuano schools were present for. Although Chair Normand and other members used a microphone to communicate with the public at home, members and staff at the actual meeting could not hear or communicate with one another.

**II. REPORT OF STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES**

Student Representatives were not present at this meeting.

**III. PUBLIC COMMENT**

About 30 members of the public signed up for public comment including Paraprofessionals, teachers, parents and city residents. They did not wait to be called in the order they signed up but rather began commenting as soon as the meeting started. All of the comments made were in support of offering Paraprofessionals a higher wage starting at \$25,000 per year, a 2-year contract and job security after 4 years as well as requesting that School committee members join the negotiating team.

After public comment the chants continued and so the meeting recessed at 8:28 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 8:40 p.m. Members of the audience continued chanting and shouting things out, they demanded attention and respect from the committee members.

**IV. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT**

**A. DISTRICT REPORT**

- **Benjamin G. Brown School – School Improvement Plan**
- **Michael E. Capuano Early Childhood Center – School Improvement Plan**

Tabled

**B. Personnel Report**

Tabled.

**V. REPORT OF SUMCOMMITTEES**

**A. School Committee Meeting for Rules Management:** February 3, 2020 (Dr. Ackman)

Tabled.

**VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**A. Somerville Public Schools Policy Manual**

The following policies are being presented this evening for second reading:

- File ADDA: Background Checks
- File ECA: Building and Grounds Security

Tabled

**VII. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Field Trips** (Recommended action: approval)  
June 1, 2020 – June 5, 2020

Grade 5 Students from the Healey School will visit Nature’s Classroom. Transportation via school bus, student cost is \$475.

In an attempt to address some of the items on the agenda a motion was made to approve field trips.

MOTION: Motion by Ms. Pitone, seconded by Ms. Krepchin to approve this field trip. Motion approved via voice vote.

The audience chanted “we’re not leaving!”. The meeting recessed at 8:50 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 9:22 p.m. Chair Normand immediately put forth a motion.

MOTION: Motion by Chair Normand, seconded by Mayor Curtatone, to direct the Somerville School Committee negotiating team to contact the STA Paraprofessional’s negotiating team tomorrow to schedule additional negotiating sessions. The motion was approved via voice vote, all but Dr. Phillips who was not in the room at that moment voted yes.

At Ms. Pitone’s request, Chair Normand clarified that the negotiating sessions would be scheduled in addition to the already scheduled mediated sessions. In addition, Chair Normand will also add as an agenda item, “The Composition of the Negotiating Team to be considered”, to the following Executive Session, which is scheduled for the following Monday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>. Members of the public were content with this motion and left the meeting soon after.

**VIII. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT (TAKEN OUT OF ORDER)**

**• Homework Policy**

Chair Normand introduced Assistant Superintendent Mazza who presented the Homework Policy Update. (See attached). The introduction to the presentation included the following:

- School Committee passed a new Homework Policy in early 2019 with an expected immediate rollout.
- However, the revised policy was put into abeyance in order to address STA concerns and gather additional information from educators and through focus groups and surveys.
- The goal of the School Committee is to have a new Homework Policy for implementation in August of 2020.
- The old homework policy remains in effect.

Following the presentation, discussion ensued which included the following:

- Homework for Pre-K to Grade 2 students and its impact.
- Teacher Focus Groups and teacher participation; Ms. Pitone made a request for the survey data.
- Equity in regards to homework.

It was decided that members would talk about the most efficient and thorough way to move the policy forward and make a decision at a future meeting of whether to send it back to the Rules or Ed Programs subcommittee.

**IX. APPROVAL OF MINUTES** (TAKEN OUT OF ORDER)

- December 16, 2019
- January 13, 2020

MOTION: Motion by Ms. Krepchin, seconded by Ms. Pitone, to accept the Regular School Committee meeting minutes of December 16, 2019 and January 13,2020. Motion approved via voice vote.

**X. NEW BUSINESS** (TAKEN OUT OF ORDER)

**B. Acceptance of Donations** (Recommended action: approval)

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

<b>Donation</b>	<b>Donor</b>	<b>City, State</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Program Donated to</b>
Monetary	Chris Hawks	Bedford, MA	\$500	CTE – Advanced Manufacturing
Books- India Unveiled (8), Finders Keepers (7), <i>¿Es Mio?</i> (6)	The Sheth Family Foundation	Atlanta, GA	TBD	Somerville Public School Libraries

MOTION: Motion by Ms. Pitone, seconded by Ms. Krepchin, to accept these donations with gratitude. Motion approved via voice vote.

**XI. ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS**

**Chair Normand**

Congratulated three of the winter sports teams who will be going to the MIAA State Tournament; the Boys and Girls Basketball teams and the Boys Hockey team.

**XII. CONDOLENCES**

The Somerville School Committee extends its deepest condolences to the families of the following:

**BARBARA WALSH** – Retired Teacher, taught at Southern Jr. High, Somerville High and Lincoln Park Schools – Wife of retired Winter Hill Community School Principal Joe Walsh.

**PETER ESCOTT** – Retired Teacher from Lincoln Park School.

**Linda Viola** - Mother in law of Shanna Viola, Teacher at the Capuano School.

**XIII. ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting was adjourned via voice vote at 9:48 p.m.

**Related documents:**

Agenda

Homework Policy Presentation

Submitted by: K. Santiago

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
CENTRAL OFFICE MAIN CONFERENCE ROOM – 8 BONAIR STREET  
REGULAR MEETING – FEBRUARY 24, 2020 – 7:00 P.M.**

**Somerville Public Schools - School Committee Goals 2019 - 2022**

Through the following long-range goals, we commit to addressing deep-rooted systemic barriers that have prevented us from achieving our district vision of equity and excellence and ensuring that all students, regardless of race or ethnicity, have the supports and resources they need to achieve educational success in our district now and in the future. By 2022, we will ...:

...increase the percentage of support staff of color by 6 percentage points, teachers and counselors of color by 5 percentage points, and administrators of color by 4 percentage points through evaluating and strengthening all elements of our human capital system.

... 1) conduct a district enrollment study to understand the prospective future population of the district and 2) craft a vision for school assignment and programming aligned with the district's equity policy.

... design, evaluate, and partially or fully implement student-based budgeting to ensure that every student has equitable access to rich learning opportunities that help them thrive.

... design a robust system of aligned developmental academic and social-emotional benchmarks which will be used to inform practices, policies, and resource allocation.

**ORDER OF BUSINESS**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Call to order with a moment of silence and a salute to the flag of the United States of America.

**II. REPORT OF STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES**

**III. PUBLIC COMMENT**

**IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- December 16, 2019
- January 13, 2020

**V. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT**

**A. District Report**

- Benjamin G. Brown School – School Improvement Plan
- Michael E. Capuano Early Childhood Center - School Improvement Plan
- Homework Policy Update

**B. Personnel Report**

**VI. REPORT OF SUBCOMMITTEES**

**A. School Committee Meeting for Rules Management: February 3, 2020 (Dr. Ackman)**

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Rules Management of February 3, 2020.

**VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**B. Somerville Public Schools Policy Manual**

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**C. Acceptance of Donations (Recommended action: approval)**

The Superintendent recommends the acceptance, with gratitude, of the following donations

Donation	Donor	City, State	Value	Program Donated to
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**IX. ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS**

**X. CONDOLENCES**

**XI. ADJOURNMENT**

# HOMWORK POLICY PRESENTATION FEBRUARY 24, 2020

## INTRODUCTION/ BACKGROUND

- School Committee passed a new Homework Policy in early 2019 with an expected immediate rollout.
- However, the revised policy was put into abeyance in order to address STA concerns and gather additional information from educators and through focus groups and surveys.
- The goal of the School Committee is to have a new Homework Policy for implementation in August of 2020.
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## TEACHER FOCUS GROUPS

- Teacher Focus Groups created for all schools through My Learning Plan
- Teachers allowed to use one of their allotted ten (10) hours to participate in these groups
- Each group had two facilitators (one SPS and one STA) to frame the conversations
- **Description:** This session is an opportunity for educators to review pertinent research and share their ideas and opinions about homework practices in their grade levels, subjects, and schools. The information collected through these focus groups will help to inform School Committee Policy around homework. One focus group will be held at each school though educators are welcome to attend any of the sessions.

## TEACHER FOCUS GROUPS CONT'D

### Participation

- 8 sessions offered
- 30 slots at each session
- 240 total slots for participation
- Total Participation: 77 teachers (32%)

## FOCUS GROUP THEMES

## INTRODUCTION/ BACKGROUND

## TEACHER FOCUS GROUPS

## TEACHER FOCUS GROUPS CONT'D

DATE	LOCATION
Tuesday, October 8	West Somerville
Wednesday, October 23	Kennedy
Monday, October 28	Brown
Monday, November 18	Argenziano
Thursday, November 21	East Somerville
Monday, December 9	Healey
Thursday, December 12	Winter Hill
Tuesday January 14	SHS

## TEACHER FOCUS GROUPS CONT'D

### Questions

- What role does homework play in your practice?
- What do you like about the revised policy? What gives you pause about the policy? Think of this as it relates to...
  - Student achievement
  - Skills (time management, persistence, etc.)
  - Relationships with parents/families
  - Impact on classroom practice
- Given the time allotments in the draft policy, where do you see reading fitting in?
- As a teacher what, if anything, would you change in this policy?
- Homework is one tool in a system of how we educate our students. If we prioritize reducing the amount of homework students receive each week what else in our classroom and school structures and educational priorities might need to shift to support this goal?

## FOCUS GROUP THEMES

### PreK-2

- Optional to assign or complete
- Reading: inclusive or exclusive

### Grades 3-5

- Reading: inclusive or exclusive

### Grades 6-8

- Subject specific vs. total
- Transition to High School

### All grade levels:

- Required vs. recommendation
- Not being punitive
- Parental involvement
- Developing executive functioning skills



## OUTSTANDING FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS



### OUTSTANDING FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

#### READING

- Are the time allotments in the K-8 inclusive or exclusive of reading?

### OUTSTANDING FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

#### REQUIRED VS. RECOMMENDATION

- Are the time allotments recommendations or requirements?

### OUTSTANDING FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

#### PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

- What is appropriate parental involvement in homework?

### SURVEY DATA

#### Respondents

- PreK-2: 149 (41.5%)
  - 3-5: 134 (37.3%)
  - 6-8: 126 (35.1%)
  - 9-12: 67 (18.7%)
- |                                |     |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| ▪ Total Number of Respondents: | 359 |
| ▪ Total Number of Teachers:    | 558 |
| ▪ Total Survey Participation:  | 64% |
- Principals used PD time (15 minutes) on November 5<sup>th</sup> to allow teachers to complete the survey

### SURVEY THEMES

#### Reading

- The majority of educators assign reading as part of homework.

#### Impact On Practice

- Half of educators indicated that homework had little or no impact on their practice.

## OUTSTANDING FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

#### PREK-2 OPTIONAL

- What part of homework is optional – the teachers have the option to assign HW or the students have the option to complete HW?

### OUTSTANDING FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

#### SUBJECT SPECIFIC VS. TOTAL

- Are time requirements in “grades that are departmentalized” per class or for all subjects combined? (**Different schools departmentalize at different grade levels.**) If so, how do educators coordinate planning?

### OUTSTANDING FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

#### HOMEWORK NOT BEING PUNITIVE

- What does a “form of punishment” mean?

## SURVEY DATA/ SURVEY THEMES



### SURVEY THEMES

#### Time Expectation

- The majority of educators give between 0-40 minutes of homework weekly.

#### Frequency

- There was no consistency with educator responses regarding frequency of homework.

## RATIONALE/ VALUES



# ***RESEARCH-BASED RATIONALE/VALUES***

## **Researched-Based Homework Rationale/ Values**

- **Meaningful** and **valuable** to the learning goals of the curriculum
- **Necessary** and **relevant** to classroom learning and/or real-life experiences
- **Manageable** for students to complete with reasonable time and effort
- **Developmentally appropriate** for students in terms of time, scope and expectations

# ***RECOMMENDATIONS***



## ***RECOMMENDATIONS***

### **Homework Recommendations**

- Flexibility within the policy – time allotments should be recommendations or guidelines
- Think differently with PreK-2
- Define the expectation around reading (inclusive or exclusive)
- Increase time recommendation gradually from grade to grade
- Promote and strengthen the home/ school partnership through homework
- SHS policy should remain unchanged this year; focus groups in 20<sup>20</sup>-21<sup>21</sup>