

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

January 25, 2021 - Regular Meeting

7:00 p.m. –GoToWebinar

Members present: Ms. Krepchin, Dr. Ackman, Ms. Barish, Ms. Normand, Mr. Green, Ms. Pitone and Dr. Phillips. Mayor Curtatone and President McLaughlin. ABSENT -0-

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Green called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. with a moment of silence and salute to the flag of the United States of America. Chair Green asked Superintendent Skipper to call the roll, results of which were as follows: PRESENT – 9 – Ms. Krepchin, Ms. Pitone, Ms. Barish, Mr. Green, Dr. Ackman, Ms. Normand, Dr. Phillips, Mayor Curtatone and President McLaughlin. Absent- 0-

II. REPORT OF STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

Student Representatives Brian Recinos and Nathalya Salmeron were present and reported on the following:

- The parent/teacher conferences are on Thursday January 28 (virtual) from 3:30-5:30 p.m.
- Course selection process has begun review with students on January 21st
- First semester grades are closing this Friday second semester begins next week
- School wide survey has been given to students on Aspen, X2 where we receive announcements and grades. This survey is to ask students what they expect from their new principal since the current principal is retiring
- Remote setting survey available on Aspen and Google Classroom
- Student trip for the Class of 2022 has started accepting funds to go to Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic

Ms. Norman commented on the Class trip and mentioned that this trip is independently run and organized by students. Ms. Salmeron confirmed that this is not a school sponsored trip, it is being organized by the students and this gives students the opportunity to pay ahead and have it paid by the summer of 2022. Ms. Normand stated that she loved the planning and initiative but wants it to be clear that this trip is organized by the students and not a school sponsored trip. It does not need approval from the School Committee.

Chair Green noted that state law says that any overnight away trips must be approved and chaperoned by the School Committee if they are sponsored by the schools and this trip is not one of them.

Ms. Salmeron added that if anyone is interested in more information about the trip, the Break Away Beach Company is organizing it and you may also search SHS senior trip 2022 on Instagram for more information.

At this time Chair Green mentioned that Sibby LaGambina, the Principal at Somerville High School will be retiring this year and the Superintendent wanted to say a few words.

Superintendent Skipper asked Mr. LaGambina to turn his camera on, she greeted Mr. LaGambina and said that the School Committee wanted to wish him well but for her it is with mixed emotions that she shared the news and accepted his retirement. Mr. LaGambina is a rarity in many ways. He has spent and dedicated his talents in life in one place and we are very fortunate that it was Somerville. He attended and graduated from Somerville High School and served as a teacher, baseball coach, class advisor and a mentor to so many people. He became a leader first as the chair of the science department and helped Somerville High to earn the 2011 Massachusetts Biotech Education Foundation's Innovative School of the Year Award.

He became an assistant principal of Elm House and now is finishing his career as a principal hoping to see Somerville High School through its building project and on to a new beginning. His loyalty to our students, to the staff and to the city spans over 35 years. Still in every meeting, he brings the same level of passion and commitment to service in everything he does. He is one of the most positive people she knows with a "can do" attitude, he is authentic, a visionary, a tireless worker, loyal and wants every student to get the best opportunity possible.

Under his leadership SHS has launched early college programming, led SHS to the highest ever graduation rate of near 90% and to the lowest dropout rate ever at less than 1%. He has fostered partnerships, reached out into the community, and brought them in like Biogen and Aspire. He has a deep regard for our equity work that he has championed in the district but especially at SHS with the students and the staff. He is one of a kind, a rare find in a person and a professional that we will never replace but always remember. She wished him and his family all the best for this stage of his life. It has been an honor and she is humbled to have worked with him over the past six years.

Mr. LaGambina replied and took the time to thank Superintendent Skipper and the School Committee for the privilege of being the principal of Somerville High School over the past six years. He is a graduate and this is a dream come true for him. He has been fortunate to be principal here and to have the support of the Superintendent, the School Committee and the Mayor. You all have been great partners to the Somerville School system and to him personally. It has been 35 years and he counts the years he was a student so it is going on 40 years and he would not trade it for anything.

Ms. Normand thanked Mr. LaGambina as a School Committee member and as a parent. There have been some complicated moments and many challenges and as a parent Mr. LaGambina has been accessible, heartfelt and thoughtful and it has been a gift. If you look at our current students and look at our equity policy and hiring policy, you will see we are trying to have our administrators and staff look more like our students. Mr. LaGambina has led the way and if any students want to be educators, he is a fine role model.

Mr. LaGambina thanked Ms. Normand and replied that he has mentioned many times that the sky is the limit and someday this could be you.

Mr. Mazza added that a lot of the work he did with him was when Mr. Mazza was principal at Winter Hill, He looked up to Mr. LaGambina very much as a role model and his commitment to students, staff and to the community is commendable. Mr. LaGambina helped him understand the whole high school experience when he transitioned to the role of Asst. Superintendent. From the redesign and re-envisioning work that is happening with the Barr Foundation and being able to serve many students and cultivate as many relationships as he did. Mr. LaGambina will greatly missed and wished him the best.

Chair Green commented that he loved the pure glee Mr. LaGambina had when he announced he would be the first Principal of Somerville High. In the past, there had been a Headmaster and Building Masters and those words have meaning in society that we need to get away from. He gleefully accepted that change and that growth; he willingly accepted the changes both inside and outside the building and kept Somerville High's many traditions. He did it with real continuity going to the new Somerville while still keeping some of the old Somerville High. He very much appreciated Mr. LaGambina accepting that adaptation.

Mayor Curtatone said the year Mr. LaGambina started teaching the Mayor was a sophomore in college and a permanent sub at Somerville High School. Both he and Mr. LaGambina come from immigrant families and growing up in Somerville and he felt his family was welcomed here. In the late 1980's there was a lot of change going on in the community, people immigrated from many different places and they saw this community as one of hope. There are some residents today who forget how difficult it can be as an immigrant and resist immigrants. Many people embraced new people coming to our community but also championed the necessary change and evolution of how we epitomize a community that embraces tolerance and diversity but is also welcoming. We have been blessed with educators like Mr. LaGambina and many more like him, to say he comes from Somerville and has roots as an immigrant in this area and went to Somerville Public Schools and then became principal of that high school. He was one of many that made people feel welcome. He led with equity before it became something we speak of often. He acknowledged that his son is very lucky to have had his time there with Mr. LaGambina as principal.

Dr. Ackman thanked Mr. LaGambina for the short time she has been here; she has seen his passion and dedication. As someone who wanted to be a high school principal and saw how much work it would be, she decided on another path. Speaking from that perspective, she offered her admiration for the dedication he has given to the city and our students.

Congratulations to Mr. LaGambina

III. REPORT FROM MAYOR CURTATONE (taken out of order)

A. REOPENING UPDATE

Mr. Rich Raiche, Director of Infrastructure & Asset Management reported on the following

- Minimum Threshold for Occupancy
- Additional Work while buildings are occupied
- Consistent with Harvard School of Public Health
- Building Completion Update
 - filters delivered and installed in group 1 & 2 and in process in group 3
 - Retro-commissioning in process at group 1,2, JFK and WHCS
 - Coordinating with maintenance contractor (Honeywell)
 - Reviewing technical details at ESCS
- Portable Units in process
- CO2 monitors in process
- Wellness room exhausts in process
- Construction Schedule/there are many components involved
 - Supply Chain
 - Labor Force
 - Schedule estimates
 - Design omissions
 - Unforeseen conditions
 - Complexity/Quantity of work
- Projected Completion Dates
 - SHS possible occupancy next week
 - Capuano possibly after February break
 - ESCS, Argenziano and WSNS all around February 15th
 - Kennedy similar to Argenziano
 - Healey no change of date
 - WHCIS has started and it is extensive; return date could be in June

Mayor Curtatone thanked Mr. Raiche for the update and list of the current issues. They have been in touch with Honeywell and will be meeting with them soon. After speaking with the head of the Northeast region, he is committed to having everything resolved in a timely manner. He will report back when he has concrete plans and wants to be open and transparent that these are the risks when you become involved in any project like this. They will report back if there is anything significant that needs to be reported. The Mayor thanked Mr. Raiche and his team for their hard work and thanked everyone for their patience and flexibility.

Questions:

Ms. Krepchin commented that the details are very helpful and wants to thank the city for allowing a few teachers and students to come into these buildings for small amounts of time. There is frustration in the community that we did not do this earlier on. She wants to make it clear to the public that it is happening now, even if in retrospect, something could have been done differently to make this happen sooner.

Ms. Pitone commented that her understanding from the administration is that it takes about three weeks to initiate their plans, to contact families, to set up transportation, to contact teachers and to figure out who is coming back in order to launch an in person return date. Right now we are three weeks from the return date to the high school, that being the outside date. She asked how confident they are that the building will be ready February 22 so the Superintendent's staff has time to plan and execute.

Mr. Raiche answered that there is no such thing as a "non zero risk" in this business. Given where we are and how we have narrowed down the trouble shooting. They have done a preliminary test that proves it will work in theory, now they have to do it in practice. He is cautiously optimistic to give Superintendent Skipper the green light to begin that plan with the Capuano, even though they don't have those systems up 100%, they have a work around for that. Even if they don't have a repair plan, all this work is on the roof of the building so the workers do not come in

contact with the kids. The other schools are more complex so there is hesitation to give the go ahead for the other buildings.

Ms. Pitone commented that she wanted to make sure there was good collaboration and understanding by the contractor and the city for what the administration really needs. To have the three weeks that they really need to return students to the buildings. It is important to make sure they collaborate on that.

Superintendent Skipper thanked Mr. Raiche for his report and for staying in communication with the administration regarding the buildings. Everyone is working as fast as they can. We will be developing a plan that will give some buffer to this as well. In talking to parents, we would propose a range of dates, one to two weeks, so that if something goes awry people's plans are not thrown to the wind. Also for educators, they need time to get in and set up, get specialized equipment set up. Once we have the all clear we still have some things to do in the buildings.

Ms. Barish echoed Ms. Krepchin's comments thanking the city for making it possible for some small groups to be inside. She noted that there is a plan for Community Schools to expand beyond where they are now more of the schools, and wondered given the Brown School situation and the space limitations if the city anticipates being allowed to use the Brown School indoor space, especially for Community Schools. If not, is there space at one of the other schools for the kids enrolled in Community Schools at the Brown School and the Brown School Community School teachers?

Mr. Raiche replied that the indoor spaces that have been allowed have been through a conversation among himself, Director Kress and Robert Kelley. They looked at the occupancy of the space, the head count, the space and the air turnover in the space. They would have to take a hard look at the Brown and have a very small head count and a very short time span in those spaces because there are no air handlers in those spaces. There is much more leeway in the other spaces. There would be very limited space in that building or they would have to move to much larger spaces.

Superintendent Skipper added that AFA, Capuano and ESCS have their after school programs up and running. WHCS will have theirs this week. Healey and Kennedy are slated to start next week and WSNS is slated to start before February vacation. Community Schools will be running over February break. Although the classrooms at the Brown are very large, there is no big space. Community Schools have been trying to spread the students out. We will be trying for a different space for the Brown School for that purpose.

Mayor Curtatone commented that we continue to try to be creative to provide kids with the services they need and to find alternative spaces for use in our community. He is not going to allow the bricks and mortars that are available to us to be the only spaces for the kids in the community. They are looking for alternative spaces.

Ms. Normand thanked Mr. Raiche and the City and acknowledged that they are working hard on this and there are many variables but these are kids and families. She realizes this point is not lost on the City, but in the last month, the conversations she has had have shown her that a number of kids are disengaging and wonders if we are going to get them back. Having a firm return date is critical, so once those buildings are safe we can quickly and effectively move back in. The communication on this is so important for so many reasons. We are in negotiations but giving educators and administrator's time to implement the plan is important. To families it would mean so much to have a firm return date. There is a huge amount of time and effort involved in the reopening. She is hopeful that we will get a firm date and once we have that date, There is a town hall tomorrow but not another School Committee meeting for two weeks, and it needs need to be communicated.

Mayor Curtatone said all the points are valid from the family's comments and suggestions from families and some who express their frustration and anger. He acknowledged that what they are going through must be painful. We feel we need to be clear why we do not give a firm date, every time we have a positive step forward we open up a wall and run into problems that can delay the opening again. The reality is whatever we find has to be dealt with. They would be disingenuous to give a firm date based on that. They want to be ethical and honest about the information that is shared and will spare no expense or effort to bring the schools back on line.

Ms. Normand wanted to be clear that a firm date means the buildings have to be absolutely safe before reopening. Also exploring other spaces and have the high school students considered. It is very hard on them and any creative

solutions to get at least the seniors back would be appreciated.

Mayor Curtatone agreed that it is imperative for the seniors to be back in school and he needs to see what that looks like. It will not be a question of financial resources. They will invest in whatever we need to give every kid that opportunity and to try to make up over the rest of this year and through the summer what was lost for these students.

Dr. Ackman asked about alternative options that we have not considered. We bought tents and want to know if there is a way to use them. Also outdoor heaters or other things that have not been explored that we can use.

Superintendent Skipper said that the school department did purchase tents, but they are not snow rated, and the difficulty is the ability to anchor them, moisture in the ground and snow are the two key pieces. We are going to be looking at March for a time to put them back out. In addition, recreation and Community Schools have tents so using the outside is definitely an option. Along with the Mayor, she has been looking at alternative solutions and trying to think out of the box.

Mayor Curtatone added that the city has reached out to private property owners over the last several months and have some leads, which they are following up on. Some come with the same challenges as our school buildings. They will chase down the real property and location possibilities available.

Superintendent Skipper commented that groups one and two are collapsing together so it is beneficial to wait a little while longer to have some students return to their home schools. This is a much better plan and if we can do this, we will open up space in the high school to return more students. That will come together as the timeline shrinks and we free up more space at the high school.

Mr. Barish asked Mr. Raiche if he could give any information on the Brown School. Has the site review gotten underway?

Mr. Raiche answered that yes, the work has gotten underway at the Brown School. The architects BBB were in there last week and they are amassing information on the building. The city does not have previous records for this building so they went in and laser scanned this building, the Edgerly and City Hall this week. That work has been mostly dimensional and inventory. We will be starting to get behind the walls once we have completed the informational scanning. This should be about a week out from peering behind the walls.

Ms. Barish asked for more information about the process, what is coming next and when we can anticipate getting substantial information to share about the future of the Brown School and use as a school building.

Mr. Raiche answered that Superintendent Skipper and himself talked about plotting out a timeline. The Brown is now being managed as part of the overall building assessment with a dozen other buildings. The team has not been able to extricate the Brown but it needs to be fast tracked and they anticipate giving a report on the Brown School to the community after February vacation.

Mayor Curtatone said there would have to be a lot of clarification to that. Most people don't know that in finishing a new high school they went through the Massachusetts School Building Authority process where they get a certain level of reimbursement. That is how they have completed the other schools going back 25 years to the West Somerville School. Serving on the Board of Alderman at that time, they took a vote on building a new Brown School and it didn't pass for many reasons. The MSBA is a long process and a K-6 school program would not qualify in that process, at least it didn't then. Then an assessment of the building is done and then an analysis through the school department of the programs in the school, then a determination of how we finance it. We cannot get a timeline since we need to determine what will be in that building down the road and that then determines the process we use to move forward and this is the first step of that process.

Ms. Pitone thanked both Mr. Raiche and Mayor Curtatone for sharing the complexities of returning to the Brown School. She wants to know if this will be put on a future agenda for the School Committee and can there be a follow up of the building reviews done in 2018 and the review that is being done now, what is the difference between the reviews. She wants to make sure that part is included.

Chair Green commented that yes, the Brown School will take much deliberation and we will put it on a future agenda but let's get the schools open first.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Kinga Borondy - 14 Landers Street. Comment submitted to be included in these minutes.

In a meeting earlier this month, Ms. Phillips opened the door for the discussion of personal loss. Thank you. I hesitated to make this personal, but I will take my minutes to relate that in the past week, my world has shrunk by three:

Helen Mills Allen, (88) Mimi Watson, as we called her. She never missed a tennis match that featured my partner and cheered him through all his wins and defeats. She was a gentle old soul, always smiling and very welcoming to outsiders who dated the boys in her neighborhood.

Jerome S. Cline, (87). Uncle Jerry. Uncle Jerry was a natty dresser; careful to show just enough cuff, just enough crease and showed all his teeth when he laughed; and he laughed often, mostly at the stories he loved to tell regardless of who had heard them before.

Uncle Jerry came to see us every day we spent at the summer camp house he once shared with his sister in South Dartmouth. He would come to say hello, enjoy a seat in the sunshine and share a beer and a handful of peanuts, a sandwich or cheese and crackers. Uncle Jerry wasn't fussy, he just liked the company.

Uncle Jerry never came empty handed: a 5-pack of beers, a sleeve of Cola, an estrafalaria pair of pants, multi-colored, that fit no one but were too cool and too kitschy to toss. A ceramic rabbit, scratcher tickets that he was sure were worth \$1 million, and the entertaining and interesting stories of his life: A Brown graduate, he was a pilot in the U.S. Air Force, constructed fence in Nova Scotia, and most recently, he was a docent at the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

He sponsored my daughter's application to Brown (she chose Temple, but not because Jerry couldn't deliver). He loved playing backgammon with Bill, collected model boats and loved high-flying kites.

And then there's Tom Roca; whom I first met when his name was Toni.

Tom: Cartoonist, humorist, television and movie producer: (credits include "Los Balseiros," nominated for an academy award in 2002, Filiprim, El Jueves) Tom lived large, loved well, and set the tone for the satirical press of La Apertura or The Opening, that helped force the transition to a constitutional monarch in Spain following the death of dictator Generalissimo Francisco Franco.

His latest tome: a collection of 50 years of his work. Apaga y Vámonos.

I will miss them all.

Also, I would be remiss if I did not take the time to urge the School Committee and the city to provide free and fast internet; free and fast WiFi to all city residents.

Amy Timmons - 96 Bartlett Street

Amy has a daughter in the seventh grade at the Argenziano School. She took the time to thank Principal Soto and teachers for their hard work to keep the kids engaged and keep a positive learning environment on remote learning. It is not an easy task and she is continually impressed with their dedication to their students and their care of them. She is a teacher in a neighboring school district and understands the concerns about the spread of the virus and how difficult it is to get students back into the school buildings. She also feels that once the building projects are complete and safety protocols are in place this can safely happen. The school district where she teaches has been using a hybrid model since September. With the reduced building capacity, mask mandates and the use of hand sanitizer routines she has been comfortable teaching in person classes and has not gotten sick. She also wants to applaud Somerville's proposed surveillance testing; they are going above and beyond to ensure the safety of both teachers and students. Thank you all for everything you are doing to make this possible.

Caitrin McDonald - 47 Madison Street

Caitrin started off by saying her comments were a mix of her words and of Lauren Hanley MD at MGH. Lauren is the mom of two students in the system and Caitrin the mom of three students, twin ninth graders and a fifth grader in the UNIDOS program at ESCS. She is a single mother and essential worker who has not stopped going to work in person. After one year of struggling through the pandemic, she is regrettably looking for other options for her children. Families have struggled for safe and reliable childcare and alternative learning environments for their children without any communication from the district or the city. Requests for better and more frequent communication went unanswered. Each time a date was set the goal posts were moved and the dates were cancelled or changed. There has been limited and ineffective polling of families and no polling about what they

would like for their children's learning environment for the rest of 20-21 or even where or how surveillance testing would happen this year. The challenges in Somerville buildings aren't so different or exclusive that we had to do these things so differently from our neighbors who have at least some children back in person. She understands there are many players but children are the ones most affected. There has been no community education about safety protocols and why families should feel safe about sending their children back. She expressed gratitude for Dr. Phillips' efforts to have experts discuss the safety of in person education but now it is the district's responsibility to communicate that far and wide and in multiple languages. The mental health of our children is suffering, suicide rates are soaring, children are suffering here as well but we remain closed with no return dates in this community. We have a top 1% safety plan but no children in school, families are frustrated and worried about the health and safety of their children and now they are opting to move to either private, charter or parochial schools all for the benefit of having in person education. Ms. McDonald requested communication, not just for the rest of 2021 but looking forward to next school year. Parents have already had mixed messages from the administration, staff and union leadership and so she posed the question, can parents expect children to have full time in person learning next year? Without communication from leaders, the level of trust in the district will decline. She asked for the districts help to parents by polling, educating and communicating.

Neva Durand -17 Kingston Street

Neva wanted to thank the School Committee for their hard work during this difficult time and asked that we reopen schools as soon as possible this winter. She urged the city to make a public commitment to have the schools open full time in person in September. Over the past six months the community has lost faith, the city is not prioritizing children and families. Every time a date is set, they go way past the pessimistic dates put forward by the city. Despite being in the top 1% of mitigation strategies, not one child has been in school for education purposes. Somehow the buildings are safe enough for after school, at least if the family was rich enough or had flexible enough jobs to pay to send their children to after school two days a week. She questioned how this is equitable or serving the most needy or serving public education? If the buildings are safe enough for after school then they are safe enough for the small number of special education, ELL and young learners. Families are moving out of Somerville, many are sending their children to private schools; others are weighing the alternatives for next school year unsure if the schools are going to be open. Not everyone has that option. The mayor claims to have progressive values but nothing is more progressive than a public education system.

She added that despite the amazing and heroic efforts of teachers, who have been given an impossible and thankless task, remote learning isn't working. It is not a proper modality for young kids. Literacy is the essential building block for education and yet young children like hers are stuck, unable to read or advance and are bored due to the unstimulating nature of Zoom school, they are acting out and their mental health is deteriorating. She looks forward to the day that she will not have to attend every School Committee meeting and Town Hall, when she can open an email from the Superintendent with better news, not having to advocate for Somerville to prioritize public education. She looks forward to the day that she can trust the city to make education essential. Parents are nervously awaiting word from the city about when school will open; it has now been 320 days without school for Somerville students. She asked the district to commit now for opening in September for full time schooling, and to assure families that they are going back to school ASAP this winter.

Tara McCaffrey - Franklin Avenue

Tara is a parent of an eighth grader but commented tonight as a Kindergarten teacher that has been teaching in person in an independent school in Cambridge since September. It seems that Somerville is going to extraordinary lengths to return students to school. She is concerned we are doing a serious disservice to our children and will have a long lasting impact on early learners and those with special needs. In the independent school where she is teaching pre-K and K have been in person every day since September and the remainder of the school is on a hybrid model. It is hard but not impossible; the entire school wears masks all day every day, only students and staff are allowed in the buildings, and there is frequent hand washing and sanitizing throughout the day and teaching with the windows open with fans in front of or in the windows. They have plug in standing filtration units and have more free outdoor time than is typical and weekly testing for the teachers. Everyone has their own supplies and there have been no outbreaks in the school. They spend a lot of time making sure safety measures are followed, and clean and prep all materials for children, prioritizing what can be taught in a day that is impacted by additional outdoor and transition time because of the safety protocols. Her kindergarteners are adjusting well and better than expected to COVID style school. She is seriously concerned about the younger learners and those with special needs who lost so much time last year and who this year will do better in person than remote and whom next year will take an

additional hit to being back in school.

Leah Bloom –

Leah commented requesting that children will be back in school in person five days a week in September of 2021. She said that many people have begun to make other plans for the fall because the goal posts have been moved so many times that they cannot count on school coming back in person this year or next. Staying hybrid or remote come September would be devastating to students. She encouraged the district to bring back the students at least five days a week since the transmission of the virus is low and that all of the adults that come into contact with students will be vaccinated by September. The consensus seems to be with the parents that they don't have much of a voice since they are such a small percentage of the population of Somerville that their voices don't carry as much weight because they are such a small percentage of the vote. She would like to be proved wrong and like the city to show them that students do matter and she encourages that we have solutions that are working for some students and families on remote and we need to have some solutions for the most vulnerable to bring them back in person face to face as soon as possible.

V. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT

A. DISTRICT REPORT

- Enrollment Update (Ms. Bertholdo)

Superintendent Skipper asked Regina Bertholdo, Director of Enrollment to give an update on enrollment. She added that since last April, we have had a fluctuation in enrollment so she asked Ms. Bertholdo to give a snapshot of the latest numbers. Going into the budget, enrollment becomes a regular conversation at our Facilities and Finance meetings for projections. Tonight we just want to give an overview that is provided in the handout.

Ms. Bertholdo reported with a presentation that compared FY20 with last year and FY21 was last week, which changes every day on enrollment after the pandemic. She had a presentation which showed that 23 students left the Brown; the Capuano lost 94 students especially in Pre-K, which we anticipated and the Kennedy is solid and has an additional 17 students because a Pre-K was opened there.

Superintendent Skipper pointed out that there are also new enrollments with families moving into Somerville and these numbers are fluid.

Ms. Bertholdo said it is a very high mobility year. Families are moving around especially to Medford and this has been consistent throughout this year especially with immigrant families. Healey School has lost more students as well as the WHCIS and the Argenziano, and these again are immigrant families. West Somerville has kept solid with a plus five. Between the West, East and Kennedy are the schools that capture the enrollment and registration is ongoing. Next Wave/Full Circle and Somerville High are all consistent with a gain of eight students. Enrollment is down 191 compared to April of last year.

Question and Comments

Dr. Ackman asked if the schools with the most movement are typically the ones that have the same movement during a regular school year. Ms. Bertholdo said yes for Argenziano and for Healey and WHCIS the lower grades. With no movement on the border, they have stopped registering newcomers but that was also pre-pandemic with borders closed.

Chair Green commented that we are seeing a lower immigrant community and that has to do with national issues and oftentimes people are going back home where COVID is not as rampant. Superintendent Skipper added that what Ms. Bertholdo has provided is a temporary turn, due to the temporary policy passed to have a place holding for this year and approximately 73 students are on that list. We heard from a lot of the Pre-k's that once we are back in person many of the families want to return in person.

She sits with colleagues in the urban superintendent's circle where the loss of enrollment is substantial. With students leaving there are also students coming in. We will not see until registration and the summer where numbers really lie. Ms. Bertholdo, who meets with other enrollment directors, does not see the movement in communities like Cambridge and Brookline, but we see it in communities like Medford, Malden and Lynn, which are districts we are constantly in contact with to support each other.

Chair Green thanked Ms. Bertholdo for all her hard work within the district.

A member asked if we could speak about next year's enrollment and Chair Green responded that this conversation will happen in March during Finance and Facilities.

Ms. Norman thanked Ms. Bertholdo especially for the format that she presented. Losing two hundred students in these difficult times seems almost good news and looking at real numbers is incredibly helpful and a lot of extra work. This is gold for basing our decisions on real facts and numbers.

Ms. Bertholdo stated that registrations started on January 12 for next school year and we are off to a good start.

Superintendent Skipper turned the meeting over to Mr. Mazza for a summary of several memos, which you will find in the meeting packet.

Mr. Mazza reported on the following, for which memos have been attached at the end of these minutes.

- **Calendar for the 2021-2022 School Year –**

Pre-K and K students start about a week later than 1st – 12th grade students, next year it would be September 7th and Rosh Hashanah falls on September 6th-8th. Students coming to school for the first time potentially may miss the opening because they may be celebrating their religious holiday. Mr. Mazza would like this to be tabled to another date to research how other districts handle the school calendar.

Chair Green seconded the request to table the calendar at this time.

- **The Student Opportunity Act Memo**

Is tackling inequity of funds across the state.

- Early College Program/Dual Enrollment
- Groups most impacted by COVID-19 school closure

B. PERSONNEL REPORT

- December
- January

Superintendent Skipper remarked that there were no new retirements, just Mr. LaGambina who was celebrated early on in the meeting. She then delivered the last of her report.

Superintendent's Notes: School Committee Meeting – Monday, January 25, 2021

I am so pleased to offer a special note of congratulations to Somerville High School senior Kevin Wen. Kevin was recently selected as one of the top 300 scholars in the Regeneron Science Talent Search Competition. He was selected from more than 1,700 applicants representing 611 high schools across 45 states, Washington DC, Puerto Rico, and 10 countries. As a semifinalist, Kevin earned a \$2,000 individual award as well as a \$2,000 award for Somerville High School. Kevin's project, titled Polystyrene Nanoplastics Spontaneously Enter Lipid Bilayers and the Blood-Brain Barrier, involved investigating potential severe health impacts of toxic nanoplastics in the environment resulting from plastic waste.

Kevin also received word last week from the U.S. Department of Education that he had been named one of about 4,500 candidates for the 2021 U.S. Presidential Scholars Program. Selection criteria for this prestigious award include outstanding academic and artistic achievements, leadership qualities, strong character, and involvement in community and school activities. Candidates were selected out of the nearly 3.6 million students expected to graduate from U.S. high schools in 2021. Approximately 600 semifinalists will be selected in April. The Commission on Presidential Scholars will then select the finalists in May.

Congratulations to Kevin and his parents on these outstanding accomplishments.

Just a reminder that in partnership with the City, we will be hosting our next **Schools Town Hall** online events tomorrow, Tuesday, January 26. A Town Hall for SPS staff will be held from 5-6pm. The community Town Hall will take place from 6:30-8:00pm. Information about how community members can participate in the Town Hall is available on the city's website at www.somervillema.gov/virtualtownhall. We look forward to updating you on our

reopening plans.

The City of Somerville's Prevention Services Division, in partnership with Cambridge Health Alliance, will be hosting a virtual "**Photovoice**" **Exhibition** that will be facilitated by Somerville youth to raise awareness about underage problem gambling. Photovoice is a method of telling a story through photography. The event takes place this Thursday, January 28 from 5:30 to 7:00pm. Visit www.somervillema.gov/ProblemGambling at that time for a link to the event.

Registration for the 2021-22 school year is under way and schools have been hosting virtual open houses. Visit our enrollment office website (www.somerville.k12.ma.us/enrollment) for registration and school virtual open house information.

Earlier this month, we notified families that Principal LaGambina will be retiring at the end of this school year after 35 years in our district, including the last 4 as Principal at Somerville High School. We are incredibly grateful for Principal LaGambina's commitment to our students and to the Somerville community. We have engaged the services of The Collins Center at UMass Boston, and have launched the search for the next **Somerville High School Principal**. We will be asking for the school community's input in developing a candidate profile for this important school leadership position. Parents and guardians in the district will be receiving a survey in the next day or two, and we hope you will take a few minutes to complete it. We will also be conducting a series of focus groups and establishing a screening/interview committee as part of this search process. We hope to have the process finalized by the end of April.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. SIGNING OF AFSCME UNION GROUPS CONTRACT MOA'S

Superintendent Skipper commented that two union representatives were present tonight, Leah Arredondo who represents the clerical unit and Parbati Rai who represents Food Service to celebrate the ratification of a new contract and we asked each representatives to say a few words to the School Committee. She thanked them both as well as their units for working collaboratively and coming up with a contract that members are pleased with and our district and School Committee is pleased with.

Chair Green thanked the AFSCME UNION for their patience. He thanked both members and employees for their hard work in person for most of this pandemic year and for taking on so many different things this year and doing it with grace and patience and doing what was essential for our students. He is thrilled with the contracts that were signed for the next three years.

Parbati Rai, Representative of the AFSCME Cafeteria Union thanked everyone for their support and is looking forward to working with everyone going forward.

Leah Arredondo, Representative of the AFSCME Clerical Union echoed the sentiments of Parbati from the clerical unit. She also offered a special thanks to Joe Tringale who is the best; she does not know how the units would negotiate without him. He has a wealth of knowledge and is a wonderful man. She thanked the School Committee, and commented that members are very happy with what it received especially during this time.

Chair Green recognized Ms. Norman who said that it was just like Leah to thank the unsung heroes like Joe Tringale who is a man of integrity and institutional knowledge and would hate this praise especially thanking him publicly. She thanked both AFSCME units, who were in negotiations, and then the pandemic happened, both units were patient, came to work, and did what they had to do. And added that when we reconvened to negotiate they jumped right in and the School Committee is grateful considering how complicated this last year has been. They continued feeding our kids and the schools could not run without our clerical staff so both units are truly the unsung heroes here. Food service folks are some of the only adults that students have been able to see during this year, you play not only the function of your job but of the whole district in person, she extended deep gratitude.

Chair Green recognized the signatures on the signed documents and thanked them again for all their hard work.

B. STATE GUIDANCE ON FLU VACCINE

- The State is changing their guidelines and is no longer requiring flu vaccines.

C. ACCEPTANCE OF FY 2021 GRANT FUNDS (Recommended action: approval)

MOTION: To accept all federal entitlement and continuation grants and all state continuation

grants awarded to the Somerville Public Schools during FY21

State Grants

DESE Student Opportunity Act (SOA) \$158,520.00

Federal Grants

Early Childhood Special Education 262 Grant \$60,959.00

Special Ed. Program Improvement 274 Grant \$34,318.00

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
Grant	Vanguard Charitable Org.- Baillieul Family Charitable Fund	Warwick, RI	\$1,000	Somerville Public Schools

MOTION: Motion by Ms. Barish, seconded by Dr. Ackman, to accept this donation with gratitude.
Motion approved via voice vote.

VI. ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS

VII. CONDOLENCES

The Somerville School Committee extends its deepest condolences to the families of **John Harris**, Father of Lorraine Hight, Teacher at Capuano. **Dorka Franquiz**, Lunch Attendant at the Healey School.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting was adjourned via roll call vote at 8:45 p.m.

Related documents:

- Agenda
- 2020-2021 School Calendar
- Personnel Report

Submitted by: C. White