

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

Monday, February 8, 2021 - Regular Meeting

7:00 p.m. – GoToWebinar

Members present: Ms. Krepchin, Dr. Ackman, Ms. Barish, Ms. Normand, Mr. Green, Ms. Pitone Mayor Curtatone and Dr. Phillips.

Members absent: President McLaughlin

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

Announcement: Superintendent Skipper and Chair Green announced the reopening of the Somerville Public Schools. They have been working diligently with the negotiating team and the SEU bargaining team to work toward an agreement especially on the threshold and metrics framework. They did come to a tentative agreement which has to be ratified by the broad membership and it should happen this week. It will allow getting groups one and two back into the buildings.

Superintendent Skipper reported that they need to start building readiness for the high needs special education students and hopefully getting them back at the beginning of March. There will be a follow up for group two, the ELL students and additional special education students and then group three with pre-K and K and so forth. More will be known and shared once the membership votes and ratifies. The hope is that on February 22nd more details will be shared about groups one and two and to reach out to parents in groups one and two to understand where they are with their students returning, any questions of schedule or transportation, surveying staff and understanding where their needs are with returning to the classroom. Looking forward to a positive outcome and to do additional planning.

II. REPORT OF STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

Student Representative Natalia Salmeron was present and reported on the following topics:

- Course Selection opened today and should be returned by February 23rd
- SHS junior class is designing T-Shirts to raise money to pay for next year's prom
- The opportunity for freshman to join the SMASH Summer Program ran by Northeastern University which is a STEM program they can attend over the summer
- Quarter Nominations for students who have shown great "Highlander Behavior" (included at the end of the minutes)

III. REPORT FROM MAYOR CURTATONE

Mr. Rich Raiche gave an update on the building status:

- In the course of retro commissioning the systems at the schools they discovered operations and maintenance work and are identifying the items to Honeywell
- They have had meetings on six of the seven schools, the last will be Healey, and have identified specific items and handed them over to Honeywell
- During the course of this, they have identified 206 items to be addressed. Honeywell jumped right on it and have hired contractors as subcontractors and 43 items have been closed
- The number and complexity of the issues at the Winter Hill will move the return date to after the end of this school year. They are going back to the engineers and consultants to see if there is anything else that can be done that would be more extensive for the reopening of the Winter Hill. So right now, all resources are going to the other schools.
- As they are making progress, they do not want to delay the phase reopening. They are not going full occupancy out of the gate but do need to have a plan in place to be able to do that. They will be using the portable air filtration units. The goal is to have an overall level of air quality in all the schools by mobilizing these units
- As they bring the air filtration to 100%, they can redeploy the portable units to other rooms and are essentially mobilizing plan B

Question:

Dr. Phillips asked who oversees the H-vac systems in these schools in normal times. Mr. Raiche answered that it is Honeywell who has the contract to oversee the maintenance and they have identified the deficiencies in their execution of that contract. They need to do forensics to see why they failed to deliver on their contract. He made it clear that we want to get the buildings open and can do the accounting for non-execution afterward we have students returned to class. Mayor Curtatone added that the city needs to have a narrow focus right now and will make sure Honeywell holds up to their end of the contract once we get the kids back in the buildings. Dr. Phillips added that at the end of all this she would like to know why this oversight has been happening and why Honeywell has not been held accountable all this time. Dr. Phillips commented that ventilation in our buildings is really important for our children for cognitive abilities, good ventilation in our schools is critical. She is concerned that we did not know these deficiencies until now. Mayor Curtatone answered that there is no evidence right now that the city left things unnoticed or undone but the vendor, Honeywell, was supposed to perform certain duties and they failed to do so. He is holding Honeywell to a very high standard according to the contract and he assured Dr. Phillips that the city is not done holding them accountable.

Ms. Norman asked if there was an update on the high school building. Mr. Raiche stated that the last item for occupancy that needs to be addressed is the air pressurization test. It is to make sure the stairwells have enough air during a fire to push the smoke out. This test has to be formally observed by a code specialist and the fire department. They have failed twice and deployed measures to address the issues, and have rescheduled for Thursday.

Ms. Pitone asked Mr. Raiche, if the goal is to have the occupancy permit for the high school by the end of this week. And if there are updates on other schools in this first phase of dates? Mr. Raiche answered that they were mobilizing plan B using different methods to open up the classrooms starting March 1, then March 15 and so on. Ms. Pitone commented that her understanding is that the first phase opens between March 1 and March 15 and Mr. Raiche confirmed that was the case. Mayor Curtatone added that we will be able to meet the standards and continue to drive the safety up for the buildings. Ms. Pitone asked if something in writing could be shared with the School Committee to clarify different buildings and dates accordingly. Mr. Raiche answered that he is working with Dr. Curley on the specificity of that and it is a lot of work for his team.

Ms. Krepchin asked about standards and how will nervous parents, educators and the community know when we have hit those standards? Mr. Raiche answered that the original plan was 40% ventilation and 60% filtration but this may be switched at any given time. Honeywell will give numbers on the airflow compared to what was originally assumed and we calculate how many mobile units we will have to provide to each of the rooms.

Ms. Normand asked Mr. Raiche if we have any idea of the disbursement of these units, are they ready to go. Mr. Raiche answered that Dr. Curley and himself are working on this. They have a large number of units already here and another 100 on the way. Just getting them to the right rooms and then moving them when necessary.

Ms. Pitone asked what the status is of performance criteria for our buildings. Mr. Raiche replied that the document they want to share is the retro commissioning report and the balancing report. Those reports cannot be completed until Honeywell has done all the work on the entire system. We will have calculations on a room-by-room basis on the filtration and air exchange.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Green read the Public Comment Guidelines and invited those who signed up to comment in the order in which they signed up.

Lena Flannery - commented that she has a first grade student at Brown School, has owned a home here for seven years and chose to raise her family here but feels her community is being ripped apart. Some students in her sons' class have withdrawn; kids have not had in person school for over 300 days. Those families that have had the means and the foresight have removed their kids from Somerville Public Schools and enrolled them in local private schools that are operating safely. Others have relocated and left the closed schools behind but we still have an open Lego Land. I am envious that they have secured in person education for their kids. Meanwhile my child receives his

IEP services over Zoom and will likely be an eight-year-old second grader who has yet to grasp kindergarten site words. Her husband is doing a great job trying to teach her son and he has a fantastic teacher but it is way past time to have the children back in the classroom. She feels like a fool for attending all the meetings week after week and sees the return date pushed

further and further away. She hopes this good news comes to fruition and does not just slip by like so many before. She is imploring the mayor, the teachers union and anyone who is involved to approach these discussions with renewed vigor. It is shameful that districts around us have had their buildings ready to open in the fall and Somerville had yet to order air filters and get the teachers and staff on the same page. She knows everyone is exhausted but the longer this closure goes on the harder it will be on the kids. The dates cannot keep slipping until the entire school year is done.

Elizabeth Caffrey- 71 Alpine Street Spoke about the decreasing trust the community has in both the Somerville Public Schools and the administration. Beyond Covid, she questions the administration's ability to handle a crisis regardless of type. First is the lack of communication, beyond these English only meetings, the district has been a black box to parents who are left wondering what is really going on between the town hall meetings. It is as if you are operating business as usual, when over communication should be the norm. Then the secret pilots and programs that are running and not being published on any school site and keeping the program information in lockdown. There was a pilot running at the Argenziano, a secret outdoor SPED class at the Capuano and no one can articulate just how these students were selected. Parents cannot advocate for their children if decisions are made in secret.

Administrators are lying to DESE about remote learning hours to make it look like you are meeting the guidelines, but when several grades have the same 19 hours per week, according to the dashboard, its suspect. First grade is receiving about nine hours not the 19 that is reported. If no one knows who is recording these numbers with plenty of finger pointing, then it is a blatant lie to DESE and the parents. Summer programming cannot go ahead because of union negotiations and there were no plans for it to go ahead anyway. If we cannot agree with the union on anything, there is little hope for robust programming. While you lie about the hours and opportunities, media clips have members of our committee and the Mayor touting our great remote learning plan. Have any achievement gains for students been measured? What is making it successful?

Kara Rodrigues -335 Highland Avenue has a daughter in kindergarten at the Brown School and she works at a local hospital and has been working full time throughout the pandemic. She believes schools, like hospitals, are an essential service and it has been nearly a year since students returned to the classrooms. Despite Somerville's well-intentioned plans, the buildings are still not open for in person learning. Although she may have given up hope for this year, she has not given up hope for next year. She urges Somerville to have in person learning five days a week for the students in September. If this is not possible, she urges the city to let parents know well in advance so they can make alternate arrangements for their children's education. She never thought leaving public school or leaving Somerville would be something she would ever consider but she never thought in person education was something she would have to fight for. She would like to commend the after school program, this is all the social interaction some children get each week. Staff have been really creative trying to keep the kids active in the cold outdoor weather and because of the weather; the program has been cancelled many times. She urges you to get the programs inside as soon as possible.

Caitrin MacDonald - 47 Madison Street has been trying to reach out to the Latino community since the district says it has not heard their voices. The district has made it incredibly difficult for non-English speaking parents to have a voice as evidenced by this evening. There are too many obstacles to their participation and this is an enormous equity issue especially after speaking with parents. Many of them want their children back in school contrary to what we have heard from public officials and others speaking for them. There is an expectation of trust when the city has done so little to gain our trust and so much has been done to make people dubious of the city's decision-making process. We need your communication, we need inclusion for everyone. Of all the Latin, speaking parents I have spoken to over 30 families want their students back in school and all of them expect their children to be fully back in person in September. Schools closed because of a public health crisis and the unknown, we now know the science, we know about the virus and we know what to do to protect ourselves, but our schools are still closed. They are not closed because that is what is best for students or teachers, but because a small group of individuals have not yet decided to do the right thing and do what public health experts tell us. These decisions will have an impact on children for a long time, perhaps a lifetime. We know education has a profound impact on the lives of children and keeping schools closed this long is reprehensible and unnecessary. Our neighbors have figured it out even the government has asked for the schools to be reopened, when will you listen and act for all our students

Betsy Larkin - 2 Emerson Street would like to say that Caitrin was incredibly articulate. Her kids' teachers have been doing the best they possibly can in this environment and she knows the district put a lot of effort into online schooling but it has not been smooth. Her kids have been isolated and there are tears every day. Her homebody child is desperately missing his friends. It is affecting their behavior, it is affecting their mental health, their district issued Chromebooks are faulty. Her kids were kicked out of Zoom so often by early January she stopped using them. The updates did not work and it was very disruptive. She got around it by using old devices and it was a makeshift at best. Her children are seven and four and she is very worried that the in person date will be moved back and they will not go in person at all this year. She is terrified for her

first grader, who has been seeing the reading specialist at Argenziano two days a week, that he too will not be able to read site words like the previous caller. So many other towns made in person learning work. Are our kids learning, some of them are, but their mental health is suffering? The other issue is Wednesdays; nothing is done in my house on Wednesdays. Time was up.

Jardayna Laurent - has lived in Somerville for 16 years, 14 of them as a property owner. Her children go to the Brown School and they have seen so many positive changes in the city over the decade they decided not to move to Arlington or Andover like lots of their friends did. They made a conscious decision to stick it out in their walkable neighborhood in their too small condo. Then Covid hit, they treaded water here, while she went to work each day as an essential worker and her husband worked from home and supervised remote learning. We are lucky, my kids have two parents, kids without special needs, good English language skills and good internet connectivity. Still we are struggling and if we are struggling, I cannot imagine what other parents are going through. Meanwhile the scientific debate around safely opening schools during Covid has been settled. You need good strong protections, good safety measures in place, masking, good ventilation and that is it. My family has the opportunity to buy the apartment downstairs and a year ago; this would have been a no brainer. But we haven't pulled the trigger because of the uncertainty of the future of the public schools. We know more and more families relocating to other cities and towns and we are losing an important segment of our population and our schools will decline. People will say do not move to Somerville because the schools are not where you want your children to be. If public education is not made a priority in Somerville then we will find somewhere where it is.

Amy Ramanville -17 Carleton Street, Amy remarked that she has two sons who are both autistic. Her oldest son started at the Capuano at three years old and he was nonverbal at the time. She was so lucky to have had the support of the teachers and therapists there. She watched as he blossomed and learned. He made friends and started to speak. He is eight years old now and able to learn in a mainstream classroom because of those teachers. Her younger son is three years old now but unlike her oldest child he turned three during the pandemic. He has had no therapy since then, no speech support, and no social skills support. He has no friends and no peers to share experiences with and learn. He logs in every morning for a thirty-minute session and that is all the school has, even though his IEP says he should have far, far more. Last week she learned that there are students with a similar diagnosis who have returned to school and are receiving the services her son desperately needs. Services that have not been offered to her son even with repeated enteritis for support. The announcement of phase one is wonderful to hear but we were also told that the students would return in December. That date has been changed many times. Are there any back up plans? Her trust in the district will take a long time to rebuild and it will start with the reopening. It will also require extensive compensatory services to make up for all the lost time. She hopes there are plans in place to help the children who have been deeply damaged by this year.

Beatrix Gomez- 17 Pritchard Ave stated that as a Latino woman she would like to share her concerns about how the City of Somerville has not prioritized the education of its Latino population which makes up almost 50% of its student body. The Latino community has no representation in its elected officials, in the city administration or the senior school administration who are the ones spearheading the reopening of our schools. Elected officials rely on a network of information to find out the desires of the Latino population to return to school without any formal outreach. They ignore how the future of this community can be impacted by a lack of access to an in person education. They talk about the fears of this community to return to school not understanding that this fear is a lack of trust. How can the Latino community trust an administration that fails to represent them and fails to reach out to them in their native language? Meetings regarding school openings rely on translators. At the last town hall when the translator went off line the city struggled to translate because they had no native Spanish speakers on their committee. A Spanish-speaking father, who called in to express concern about how his son is becoming disengaged with online learning, was left hanging and waiting for a translator when he called. There have been no meetings or outreach efforts in Spanish to explain the safety measures that will take place to reopen our schools or surveys in Spanish to understand the desires of this community for reopening. A recent study by Brigham & Women's Hospital, assessed mortality rates for Covid, and compared black and brown patients to white patients with similar chronic illnesses. They found no difference in the risk of death from Covid. A difference did emerge for Latino patients that did not speak English; they had a 35% higher chance of death. Some of these residents waited until they were very sick because they did not trust the care provided by big hospitals or feared detection of immigrant authorities. The study found that trust is at the heart of fear and language is the barrier of trust. What is the city doing to bring back the trust of the Latino community? What are they doing to reach out to them in their native language, and get their insights for in person learning? Are you reaching out to their churches or setting up booths in the markets they go to? We need to bring our Latino community back to school. Society needs more Latino doctors, politicians, government officials, teachers and school administrators. We need to break the inequality that has been evident because of Covid. As a Latino woman she feels fortunate to be one of the 30% of Americans that have been given the privilege of higher education, it hurts her to see how the city of Somerville has disregarded the educational needs of the Latino community. Starting by disregarding their language and denying students some of the same

opportunity, she had. She calls on officials to act.

Ms. Gomez then presented statements that were organized by a Latino parent on WhatsApp, for other Latino parents to give their opinions on school reopening. They were read in both Spanish and English.

Lauren Hanley - 80 Bay State Ave says she wants everyone to know that zip codes matter; you can go a half a mile from here and be in Boston, Arlington or Medford. These cities have Covid positivity rates in the one to two percent range and they all have either Pre-K through 12 in person already or a very clear path to do so over the next few weeks. If you live in Somerville zip codes, you have a 1.56% positivity rate and only a handful of our special education students back. This is because of our wonderful volunteer teachers. If your teacher did not agree then your child is still home with possible irreparable harm done because you live in a zip code that rejects science. We live in a zip code that has our building locked by our mayor. If only you could move a half mile in any direction, you could get your child into in person learning. If you don't believe our kids aren't suffering you have not looked hard enough in our own backyards. Children here are suffering and it is deeply troubling. From our youngest learners to our high school seniors it is here. In health care, it has been shown that zip codes can translate into health care deserts. Your access to medical services changes based on zip code, your risk of death changes can be based on your zip code. Here in Massachusetts we are now looking at education disparities based on zip codes. All of our neighboring cities have similar buildings, similar prevalence of Covid. No one is special, no one is unique except if you live in Somerville your child is being denied their right to an in person education based solely on your zip code. Lauren spoke at a School Committee meeting late last summer and the last sentence of her statement said she believed we were in a pediatric public health emergency, that was August 2020 and we are almost one full year past the schools closing and we are still in this public health emergency. Our children's health depends on you and it should not be based on their zip code.

Emily Hickey - 45 Concord Ave has a child that attends the Argenziano and tonight's news about metrics and thresholds is extremely welcome. For much of this year it feels, as though our children are an afterthought at best and a nuisance at worst. She wanted to thank and commend the people who have shown up over and over for Somerville students since September and continue to do so. The site staff at community schools have been creative, adapt and expand their work when nobody else seems to care. They have overcome a lot to serve our kids and I hope their work will receive the recognition and compensation that it deserves. She has lived in Somerville for almost 14 years and I have been proud to send my child to SPS, she has raised her child in a vibrant, engaging city but in recent months has seen friends leave SPS to either attend a private school or are moving out of the city entirely. She hopes tonight's news will stem the tide but the exodus does not seem to be stopping and this is breaking her heart. But she does not deny she has had the same thought since there has been no commitment to the goal of a five day in person school week for even the fall of 2021. This is a reasonable goal and with the absence of a statement, many parents will believe the worst since the return date has been moved over and over again. Trust is at an all-time low for good reason; Somerville is on the road to be a place people wanted to raise their families but is quickly becoming a place they feel they have to leave. Many of us have been saying the same thing month after month privately and publicly and are tired. Her request is twofold, commit publicly to an in person five day a week for fall 2021 at the latest and provide additional resources to community schools so they can continue to expand on the critical work they have been doing so far.

Blanka Pena spoke in both Spanish and English she is the mother of Emely Portillo-Pena (*see below)

Ashley Addington -49 Church Street stated we are on our 89th day of remote school for my second grade student. There has been no concerted effort by the district to survey parents and evaluate the quality of remote learning this year. She would like to share some information about remote learning in Somerville and how it relates to regulations and guidance, that DESE has issued. DESE surveyed all districts across the state in November 2020 to collect information on synchronous, asynchronous and in person learning hours. They made it clear that districts should be working to make sure this is not a lost year and students need to continue to progress by finding ways to engage students creatively. Somerville has reported the average first, fourth and seventh grader receives 19 hours of synchronous learning per week. Surveying parents around Somerville does not match this report for first grade, using data from first grade classrooms in six out of eight schools we calculated an average of 11 hours of synchronous learning per week which is much lower than the 19 hours reported to the state. Who can explain the discrepancy? Central administration is unable to explain the discrepancy or share their source data. Is Somerville reporting accurate information to the state? Currently DESE is asking for updated reports, this month, to their latest guidance from December 2020. How is Somerville adjusting to these changes, will it be accurate? What is Somerville doing to engage with students and families to provide the most robust learning environments while we are stuck in this endless cycle of buildings that remain closed while we have one of the best testing systems in the country in place. What are we doing to think outside of the box, be creative and improve remote learning for our students. The trust is pretty shattered between our district and families. Clear and frequent communication is needed to rebuild these relationships. She hopes the School Committee

and central administration will set aside some time to talk about these issues. Even when Somerville starts hybrid in the spring remote learning will still be 60% of the week. Somerville needs to initiate a thorough review of remote learning and commit to providing high quality consistent and engaging learning until the end of the school year.

Ksenia Samokhvalov - 60 Irving Street has a second grader at the Brown School and has been out of school for the last 334 days, her younger child will be in school in a year and a half, hopefully at the Brown School however, that may change. She has a few questions about the portable air filtration units and if they can be used at the Brown School. It should be possible to use high air filtration systems in addition to the ventilation through the windows to get to the high levels of air exchange rates we would want. Also, please consider using these for after school. The reason her younger child is doing ok is that he spends two afternoons a week attending the after school program. However, they could not meet last week at the Brown school because of the weather. The other comment she had was about surveys for families, the last one she received was last summer about remote learning. No one has asked how it was going or what the families would actually prefer. She wants to make a plea for a well-designed survey. We have experts on survey design in the community who would be glad to volunteer their time designing a survey that is not biased and can present actual data, something that breaks down information by demographic not irrelevant information. I ask you to present a survey that asks the community what they really want and do not misinterpret the information and skew the data.

Elizabeth Janiac - She has been a resident of Somerville for the past 10 years, she holds a doctorate degree from the Harvard School of Public Health, she has content and methodological expertise relevant to understanding the negative impact of school closure on children and working parents. Her son would be a third grader if he was allowed to go to school. He receives remote instruction. She is here to remind this body and our city of the value and importance of public education because she believes we have truly forgotten it. If we truly knew, there is no way anyone in city government or educational leadership would have let the children suffer so greatly for so long under remote instruction. Her grandparents were born in Chelsea and her father grew up in Revere when she grew up he told her more kids in his graduating class ended up in prison rather than college, but my father completed law school. Janiac is an uncommon name but also a peasant name, of the seven people named Janiac, to complete a dissertation in the United States, three are in her family, all graduates of public school. Because of public school, she fulfilled her dream, she started her doctorate when her son was six weeks old and she worked throughout her training and when people asked how she did it, she told them I learned everything she needed to succeed by the time she graduated from high school. She learned to be a lifelong learner thanks to public school. She does not want to live in a world where public school students fall behind and private school students continue to succeed. Somerville students are falling behind cognitively and developmentally and they won't be able to catch up. Based on the studies of early childhood, driving our children into depression, obesity and cognitive decline. She wants the schools reopened immediately and asks if the committee really believes in public education. You must do more to open them for as many students as possible.

Jeremy Brown - 234 Summer Street. Echoed prior speakers in saying the city and district communications throughout this process has been a train wreck. He wants to echo and highlight how inaccessible this forum is for non-English speakers. You heard so many nonnative English speakers tonight because of the huge effort put forth by citizens, not the mayor's office, not the School Committee, not the unions, just the citizens who knew this was shameful. The minutes of these, meetings as far as he can tell are only video recordings which are totally inaccessible and unlike meeting minutes that are written, cannot not be put through Google Translate. No matter how well you execute opening school buildings, if you can't communicate nobody is going to trust you. So, about opening those school buildings, like Dr. Phillips he is happy to see you are going with plan B and going with portable filtration units. We are very lucky we can reopen school buildings with Covid a flu pandemic would have made it impossible, but we have known for months that we got lucky. But Somerville has flinched, portable filtration units have been suggested by experts as early as last October, he would give us a date, but he can't search the minutes. He is very frustrated that kids are coming back six months later than they needed to and saddened that it has come to the point where dozens upon dozens of parents are calling in to tell you how hard online learning is for their kids. The mayor's office didn't listen to the experts, he can't comprehend the failure or oversight that would have left hundreds of ventilation issues undetected in the school buildings for this long. He hopes people remember at the ballot box, whatever the ballot box can solve, it can't be solved in the next few months. Why can't we use portable units to open Winter Hill, Brown School and the other closed buildings and if you can't help those buildings how are we going to plan for full time in person in 2021.

Susan Nionakis - Mansfield Street said Beatrix and the prior speakers touched her in a big way, she is a third generation Somervillian raising a fourth generation Somervillian on both sides. Her son is in the eighth grade and he has been out for 334 days which started out at 14. We could not perceive the path of the pandemic and she will concur with a lot of people. She is part of the Facebook group Somerville Parents for Equitable Safe Reopening, her father was an educator in Somerville for 35 years and she has been in and out of the Somerville educational system since the mid 80's. She ran for School Committee three years ago and cannot understand why Somerville is lagging behind but she would like everyone to watch the YouTube

video which is about a 15-year-old ninth grader in the Midwest, called "Numb" and she wants you to see what this is doing to kids' mental health. She is fortunate enough that her son got through this on an even keel but many children are not as lucky. The impact on their mental health cannot be taken back. What is the city offering them as recourse to share their feelings? She messaged Ms. Soto the other day about having a picture day online for the kids, how do we help address their mental health.

Fredo Durand - Comment submitted to be included in the minutes. Minutes are added as attachments below, due to their length.

Sonia Conde - Comment submitted to be included in the minutes. Minutes are added as attachments below, due to their length.

V. Approval of Minutes

- August 30, 2020
- September 14, 2020

Tabled.

VI. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT

A. District Report

- 2021-2022 School Year Calendar (Mr. Mazza)
- Somerville Public School's COVID-19 Dashboard (Ms. Noonan)
- Somerville High School Principal Search Timeline (Mr. Mazza)
- Reopening Update

Superintendent Skipper made a comment about the Community Schools after school program which will be expanded at the Brown School using portable filtration units. That will bring all locations the ability to have programs indoors to complement the outside.

Ms. Barish asked Superintendent Skipper if she meant portable filtration systems for the Brown and Superintendent answered yes, for clarification.

Asst. Superintendent Mazza first addressed the learning times for students; he has been working with principals to get the most up to date information of the number of learning hours for students for the second submission to DESE. He will continue to get the most accurate data and try to get more synchronous learning time if that is what children need.

At the last meeting, he asked for more time to work on the calendar because of the Rosh Hashanah holiday. September 6th - 8th would be the day of observance of the holiday and Pre-k and K students would be returning on September 7th, right in the middle of that holiday. He looked at Brookline who is starting Pre-K and K on September 1st and 2nd so it did not affect them too much. Arlington is starting right in the middle of the holiday and there are community members who are asking for a delayed opening because of the holiday. He would like to thank School Committee members for sending information on his search. What he proposes is we begin on September 9th showing sensitivity to Jewish parents and letting them adjust to the classroom and connect with one another as an entire group and not having some students enter later than others.

Ms. Norman asked if the students starting later interferes with the number of days required by DESE. Mr. Mazza answered that there would be no problem and Superintendent Skipper added that these are not required grades so DESE would have no issue. Dr. Ackman clarified that it is 1-12 that is required by DESE not K-12. She then commented that this was a great solution and a great supporter.

Chair Green echoed that support and encouraged the district to survey the families and get a sense of how many families observe religious holidays and would it be a good idea to give these children the day off. Superintendent Skipper said that was a good idea and she would work with SFLC to look into that.

Ms. Norman commented that she is a strong believer that we should accommodate students in their religious beliefs without giving the day off. She knows Good Friday is still out there and she acknowledges that. This approach of accommodating students' religious beliefs and not having field trips or major academic events on these days has been very important. She

would also like to thank Mr. Vieira for rescheduling athletic events during these days. High School athletes have complex schedules so she thanks him for being sensitive to the needs of our students.

Chair Green wanted to clarify his previous remark regarding giving students the day off, we should be mindful of days when students will be out of school for religious reasons. Ms. Norman agreed and stated we should be respectful and acknowledge all students' religious holidays.

Asst. Superintendent Mazza updated the School Committee on the search for the new high school principal. In their packets, a memo was included that gives the principal search timeline update.

- Hired the team of Edward J. Collins Jr. Center for Public Management for the search, the same group used for the last principal search
- January 13th thru February 3rd focus groups were held with 35 students, grades 9-12 and 25 staff members, parents and community members both in English and Multilingual
- Surveys were sent out, all of this to create a profile for what was wanted in a school principal
- Application deadline is February 19th
- Additional screening for interviews February 24th
- Initial interviews March 8th, Candidates will be forwarded to the Superintendent on March 13th
- Additional forums March 22nd thru March 26
- Decision by Superintendent around April 5th

A quick but thorough timeline. Mr. Mazza is taking the lead on the process.

Ms. Pitone thanked Mr. Mazza for the detailed timeline she wanted to clarify the community forums and asked if anyone could login and observe the top candidates. The goal is for the community to ask questions like another round of interviews and it is a great way to get more involvement from the students and the community. She asked what the process is for the screening committee. Mr. Mazza answered that it will be persons who expressed interest in one of two ways; one from the surveys and from an interest form, which went to the Director of Human Resources. Most of the representation will come from the staff, students, parents and the community.

Superintendent Skipper mentioned that there would be diversity in the committee to make sure all sides, both students and staff, are represented.

Ms. Pitone asked if the interest forms were still coming in and Mr. Mazza answered yes and he would get it posted on the website and have it sent to the School Committee members as well.

Superintendent Skipper then stated that Brianna Noonan is present at the meeting tonight; she is from the city of Somerville and will speak briefly about the COVID Dashboard. Ms. Noonan is an analyst with the Mayor's Office of Analytics and Innovation and she created the COVID dashboard posted on the city website. She reported the following:

- Posted the link which directs you to the most recent version.
- Starts with the experts and uses the Dept. of Public Health data.
- It shows the average of Covid across the counties.
- Percent positivity rates.
- Testing information
- State information
- Case counts from NDPH
- Somerville metrics
- Percent of many factors in and outside of the buildings for compliance
- Timeline for School reopening

Ms. Pitone thanked Ms. Noonan and asked when the updates are made and who does them. Ms. Noonan answered that the dashboard is updated on Thursday nights after the NDPH releases its latest statistics and she updates it herself. Ms. Pitone asked if it was done manually or is there an automated program for the updates? Ms. Noonan answered no she enters all the data herself.

Dr. Phillips thanked Ms. Noonan for her hard work, making these dashboards is not easy and it is not easy explaining them to the public.

Ms. Barish wondered if the information is available in other languages. Ms. Noonan answered no but she is researching having it translated into other languages.

Chair Green stated he has spent an incredible amount of time over the last six weeks looking at Covid information and wanted to thank Ms. Noonan for a lot of hard work. Ms. Noonan thanked him for his comments.

Superintendent Skipper noted that there have been a lot of questions about summer school and wanted to say that usually they would start to plan in mid-March for summer school. She is very excited to have buildings back and to make summer school available to all students, making sure that there are enough staff and making sure the buildings are up to date. She wants to make sure the community is aware of the planning process.

Ms. Pitone added that she appreciates the Superintendent bringing up summer school and wants to clarify what it means to have summer school available to all students. The Superintendent answered that summer school generally services children with reading difficulties, kindergarten students, students with IEP's and ELL programs for newcomers and Community Schools. This year families want the students back with each other and there will likely be academic programming along with Community Schools and the school department reaching out to others like the YMCA. Giving the school department an idea going into the fall where the students are at academically. Making sure students have fun but also trying to give the academic help, they need. Ms. Pitone said this was an impressive vision and sounds like we will be using outside partners as well as the schools to do this work.

Ms. Norman wanted to share that the Somerville Schools want to do more extensive work with the children over the summer and that the Somerville Children's Cabinet a collaboration of schools, city and community partners has Summer learning on their agenda and making sure across the city that all hands are on deck to service as many students as possible.

Mayor Curtatone added that he has talked to the Superintendent about all hands on deck and looks forward to having the student numbers as higher than normal.

Dr. Phillips wanted to know from the Superintendent when roughly registration might be open. Superintendent Skipper said probably March/ April and have a menu worked out so parents can choose what they want for their children in summer school and figure out a way to get this information. Also getting information from the parents about their plans for September for remote or in person learning. Looking to have this in all languages so we can get the best information from parents. Once they get this information from parents, they will have a better sense of what their expectations are for students.

That concluded the Superintendent Report.

Chair Green mentioned that they would not be voting on the calendar during this meeting. He is hoping that the members can go out to the Jewish members of our community to get their feedback and the Committee can vote at the next meeting.

Ms. Barish commended the amount of work that has been done to get this far and asked if the administration needed any support from the city or the School Committee to help get the resources to get this work done. Superintendent Skipper said that the Mayor indicated he and the City will give any help we need to get summer school programming underway. We also need the same plan for next year for getting additional academic support for our schools. We want to expand for next year and make sure we have outside supports for students.

VII. REPORT OF SUBCOMMITTEES

A. School Committee Meeting for Rules Management: January 20, 2021 (Ms. Barish)

B. School Committee Meeting for Educational Programs and Instruction: January 27, 2021
(Dr. Phillips)

Chair Green will roll over the subcommittee reports until the next meeting.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Acceptance of FY2021 Grant Funds (Recommended action: approval)

MOTION: There was a motion by Ms. Normand, seconded by Dr. Ackman to accept all federal entitlement and continuation grants and all state continuation grants awarded to the Somerville Public Schools listed below.

Federal Grants

Special Education- Early Childhood Targeted Special Education Program Improvement and safety Grant

\$3,936.00 (Instructional/Assistive Technology specifically to support ECIP students with special needs)

IX. ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS

Ms. Pitone requested that the subcommittee reports from the last meeting be provided to the School Committee before the next meeting since there is an important report about the UNIDOS Program.

Ms. Norman asked if the minutes are being presented at the next meeting could they be provided to the subcommittee first, for review, before the meeting. In light of the fact that all of the chairs of the subcommittees have not chaired before, she would ask that the chair make sure we have the most current policies for review.

Chair Green thanked her, recognized the importance of that, and will refer the matter to the subcommittee.

Ms. Barish stated that at the January meeting of the Memorialization Committee it was mentioned that there will be a list of names for the high school. If anyone knows of someone to be honored in this way they can email Ms. Barish or to the Committee at memorialma@somerville.gov. Additionally she is on the Wellness Committee and at the last meeting; they were carrying out the Wellsat 2.0, which is a tool for carrying out our wellness policies, which happens every three years. This may bring up policy changes in the future that may have to be considered. She will keep us posted.

Dr. Phillips was excited to share that we are getting kids in person at the high school very soon, and suggested that any person who attends in person at the high school can officially call themselves a Highlander.

Chair Green added that we do not have a school named after a person of color yet in the city and after speaking with the mayor that it may be something we will put on the agenda for the next meeting.

Dr. Krepchin asked the Chair if there had been any thought about School Committee meeting in person in the high school. Chair Green said it has been considered and they will speak further about it.

X. CONDOLENCES

The Somerville School Committee extends its deepest condolences to the families of **Maria Arruda**, Mother to Filomena Arruda, Paraprofessional at Capuano. **Florence Pero**, Library Aide at WHCS

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting was adjourned at 9:27 p.m. via roll call vote.

Related documents:

Agenda
Public comments submitted to be included in the minutes
2021-2022 School Year Calendar
Somerville High School Principal Search Timeline

Submitted by: C. White

