

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

May 20, 2019 – Regular Meeting

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

Members present: Mr. Futrell, Ms. Palmer, Dr. Ackman, Ms. Normand, Ms. O’Sullivan, Ms. Pitone, Mr. Green, Mayor Curtatone and President Ballantyne.

Members absent:

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Normand called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. with a moment of silence followed by a salute to the flag of the United States of America.

Chair Normand asked Superintendent Skipper to call the roll, results of which were as follows: PRESENT – 9 – Mr. Futrell, Ms. Pitone, Dr. Ackman, Ms. Palmer, Ms. Normand, Alderman Ballantyne, Ms. O’Sullivan, Mr. Green and Mayor Curtatone. ABSENT – 0 –

II. AWARDS AND CITATIONS

A. Massachusetts Association of School Superintendent Awards

- Maxwell Nadeau
- Henry Zou

Superintendent Skipper introduced Max Nadeau and congratulated on him on being the valedictorian of Somerville High School. She also congratulated Henry Zou on being the salutatorian, and said that even though he could not be here tonight, the district would get him his Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents Award. Ms. Skipper then read the following biography for Maxwell Nadeau.

Maxwell Nadeau exemplifies what it means to be valedictorian of one's senior class. Max set high expectations for himself from freshman year on investigating ways to challenge himself academically by supplementing his academic coursework at Somerville High through Harvard extension courses for which he enrolled in every year. His natural curiosity, love of learning and his desire to explore and discover earned him one of the highest GPA's attainable in the high school's most demanding academic program. Max is admired for his desire to pursue alternative learning from the traditional high school curriculum yet stay firmly grounded as an integral member of the Somerville high school community. He is a student whose diligence and effort and genuine desire to ensure the task at hand is successful, has made a powerful impact both inside and outside the classroom. He is an active member of student council, the robotics team and the trivia team to name a few and as a member of these clubs, has made outstanding contributions including landing the trivia team a coveted spot on the high school quiz show on our local PBS station. This accomplishment is awarded to only 16 out of 120 other high school teams who compete statewide. Max serves as the liaison for the high school on student council as the voice for the school's multi-million-dollar renovation project. He is the kind of student you never want to see graduate because he adds so much enthusiasm, positive energy and is simply an outstanding role model; but, we are happy to see max off after graduation to Harvard University where he was accepted early action in the fall!

III. REPORT OF STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

Student representatives Emily Nash and Aislinn Cannistraro were present for this meeting, and gave the following report.

- SHS celebrated a week of action focusing on supporting immigrant students in our community, from May 6th – May 10th last week.
- May 10th was Senior Prom and it was themed a night at the Oscar's.
- AP exams have been held for the last two weeks., AP Stats will be taking their test on Wednesday.
- Tuesday and Wednesday are Math MCAS and Science MCAS testing will begin in June for Freshmen.
- This week is the last week of school for seniors, their exams will be scheduled throughout the week.
- Scholarship Awards night is on Wednesday.
- The last school improvement council meeting will be this week as well.

Ms. Nash and Ms. Cannistraro thanked the school committee for allowing them to be a part of it for the past two years. It has been a great learning experience for the two of them.

Chair Normand expressed her gratitude to Ms. Nash and Ms. Cannistraro for always showing up for the past two years regardless of their busy schedules, prepared and ready to answer questions.

Superintendent Skipper expressed her appreciation for how Ms. Nash and Ms. Cannistraro always tried to seek other student voices to ensure the items they brought forth were representative of the high school needs. She wished them both the best, they are leaving big shoes to fill.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Lydia Torres shared she is a 7th grader at the West Somerville Neighborhood School. She has been doing some research on the district's composting and recycling program but is not sure this is the most effective system. She cites the slogan "reduce reuse and recycle". We should focus on the reduction of waste. Only 9% of recycling typically gets recycled. It would take a lot of work to teach people how to recycle effectively. Ms. Torres hopes the district will also focus on the education of waste and requests that we add this topic to a future agenda.

V. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT

A. District Report

- Somerville High School Building Project
- Career Technical Education

Ms. Skipper introduced Mr. LaGambina and Mr. DeSimone to discuss the Somerville High School (SHS) building project. The whole Somerville High School atrium will be offline in June. Mr. DeSimone said we would be retrofitting parts of the Edgerly building, which is the old Career Technical Education (CTE) site and current central office, over the summer. The district has received a number of important grants to prepare students for this new temporary space. Mr. DeSimone cited a \$6,000 grant for mini mills and an \$186,000 grant recently secured to procure virtual welders.

Mr. DeSimone confirmed that CTE students would stay on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary (DESE) standards. This is a partnership between the city, mayor's office, Department of Public Works, and district to make this work for our CTE students. 200 students are scheduled for CTE Exploratory next year; we are going to rotate half and half of the students. We are also planning to open up some of the shops for Full Circle students. The automatic shop will be temporarily relocated to the Herb Chambers dealership on McGrath Highway.

Mayor Curtatone then spoke to publicly thank Herb Chambers for their partnership and support of students. Entry-level technicians are highly valuable in the automotive business. Mr. DeSimone said that we currently have 6 SHS graduates working at the dealership after they graduated from Somerville.

Dr. Ackman asked how many students are coming to Edgerly? Do we have plans for traffic mitigation?

Dr. Curley reported that we expect around 400 SHS students to be coming to Edgerly though they will be spaced out over the day across multiple periods. The district is working closely with Somerville High School administrators, the Mayor's office, and Traffic and Parking to plan for transportation and traffic mitigation around the Edgerly building.

Ms. Pitone thanked Mr. DeSimone and Mr. LaGambina for all of their hard work. Can you talk more about the challenges of open campus? And what the communication plan will be for students?

Mr. LaGambina said Construction has caused the campus to be more desperate — and some students to walk further. We are actively working on the open campus challenge.

Mr. Green recommended that we put open campus on a future School Committee agenda.

Ms. Skipper added this is something that we want to revisit once the new building is open.

Mayor Curtatone asked if we are still being flexible about tardiest given all of the construction in the city?

Mr. LaGambina replied we are very flexible when it comes to tardies.

Mayor Curtatone commented that we have done this before with temporary programming at Edgerly. This is a different skill, but this is important. We are measuring and managing traffic challenges.

Dr. Ackman asked, for the Ward 1 ResiStat meeting tomorrow, will this issue come up? Mayor Curtatone replied, yes.

Ms. Skipper thanked the CTE staff for their commitment and flexibility. They have been terrific. This is an exciting opportunity that I'm personally looking forward to.

Ms. Normand commented as a mom of SHS kids, I want to thank the high school leadership and praise the positive culture they have created. Very impressed with the kids and adults in the building.

Ms. Cannistraro welcomes the chance to support communicating to 8th grade students about the transition to the high school next year.

Mr. DeSimone also thanked Jackie Lawrence for being a supporter and advisor during this process.

Ms. Norman thanked the SHS leaders for their update and attendance at the meeting tonight.

- **FY2020 Budget Update**

Ms. Skipper then gave a brief FY2020 budget update. Tomorrow is the district's final budget hearing. We are looking into data on female participation in high school athletics and enrollment. We thank the city for their support since we recognize that we are a large part of the city's budget. This district budget focuses on equity and access. We are requesting an Equity Director, expansion of the early education ECIP program to five days, as well as College and Career Access Counselor for Somerville High School. We have had many community meetings to help shape this budget. We also want to thank Mr. Futrell for his leadership as chair of the Finance Committee.

B. Personnel Report

As for personnel, as many of you know, Chelsea School District has selected Dr. Almi Abeyta as their next Superintendent. She is committed to kids and academics. Dr. Abeyta has been a wonderful presence in Somerville over the last two years.

Dr. Abeyta said a few words. I have learned so much in Somerville over the last two years. I appreciate the support of Somerville as I continue the work in Chelsea. I have learned so much from Superintendent Skipper. I know what a good district looks like now that I've worked in Somerville. Everyone has been so supportive — and this is such a healthy district.

Ms. Norman stated there is never a dull moment in Somerville and you jumped right in. Whole heart and head. Chelsea is lucky to have you. Our loss is Chelsea's gain.

Dr. Ackman commented, I think adults don't say I'm proud of you enough — and I'm proud of you Dr. Abeyta.

Ms. O'Sullivan added, in all of our conversations, you always think about your time in the classroom and as a building principal. Chelsea is very lucky to have you.

Mr. Green learned so much from Dr. Abeyta. Talking about what it means to do the work has meant a lot to me. Chelsea is one of the most important districts to think about in live equity.

Mayor Curtatone noted we are so excited and inspired by your dynamism and credentials. Chelsea is very excited to have plucked you from Somerville.

As Superintendent, it's late in the year and there are big shoes to fill. We are very deep with talent. Superintendent Skipper asks for a motion to appoint Chad Maze as Interim Assistant Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. Principal Mazza is committed to all students. Winter Hill has won the Pozen Prize for its innovation. Mr. Mazza spent 6 years in Holyoke and 7 years in Somerville. Chad has learned all facets of the job of an assistant superintendent: family engagement, Special Education, and unification of the autism strand. Chad is only ever interested in how initiatives support students.

MOTION: Motion by Dr. Ackman, seconded by Ms. Palmer to appoint Chad Mazza as Interim Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment.

Andre Green started off, I am a fan of Chad Mazza. He is thoughtful and compassionate when it comes to student needs.

Ms. Pitone is definitely going to support this recommendation. Mr. Mazza has been a great asset to the district. Taking on an interim role is very brave and valuable.

Ms. Normand stated, kids see Mr. Mazza going to Saturday soccer and he is a champion of students. It says a lot about your head and your heart.

Ms. Pitone offered, anything that the School Committee can do, please let us know.

Roll call vote: all approve.

The meeting was briefly suspended to congratulate Mr. Mazza on his appointment as Interim Assistant Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

The meeting reconvened at 8:00 p.m.

VI. REPORT OF SUBCOMMITTEES

A. School Committee Meeting for Rules Management: April 1, 2019 (Ms. Palmer)

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction of the Whole of April 1, 2019.

Tabled

B. School Committee Meeting for Rules Management: May 13, 2019 (Ms. Palmer)

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction Committee of the Whole of May 13, 2019.

Tabled

C. School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction: April 3, 2019 (Ms. O'Sullivan)

Education Programs & Instruction - Meeting Minutes - April 3, 2019

The Education Programs & Instruction Subcommittee held a meeting on April 3, 2019. Subcommittee members in attendance were Paula G. O'Sullivan and Emily Ackman. Also in attendance were School Committee Chair Carrie Normand and member Andre Green. When School Committee member Laura Pitone arrived, the subcommittee adjourned and the Committee of the Whole convened.

Participating district staff included Superintendent Mary Skipper and Data Coordinator Kenya Avant. West Somerville Neighborhood School participants included principal Kathleen Seward; along with staff and parent members of the WSNS site council. Somerville High School staff included principal Sebastian LaGambina, Carlos Contreras (teacher), Marianna Hosking (Science Department Chair), and Jodi Remington (English Department Chair).

Ms. O'Sullivan called the meeting to order at 6:07pm. There were two topics on the agenda, the West Somerville Neighborhood School Improvement Plan and the Somerville High School Improvement Plan.

WSNS staff started their presentation by giving an update on previous work regarding student wellness. They developed and refined systems for student support over the past three years, with initial data that illustrates progress. The school saw a decline in office referrals from 2016-17 to 2017-18. The number of students with six or more referrals went down over that time period, while the number of students with three or more referrals stayed roughly the same. The school noted the disproportionate referral rates for some subgroups (males, black, latino/a, sped). In response to a question about the reasons for the decline, principal Seward cited changes in lunch and recess schedule to have fewer students in each place at one time, clarified expectations in cafeteria, and a streamlined entrance to the cafeteria. Other questions highlighted potential further analysis of the data, such as the reasons for referral by subgroup, whether there were more referrals on the day that the redirect teacher was not there, and trends and patterns regarding grade levels and time of day. A staff member shared how Student Insights is useful for analyzing trends for students and proactively get ahead of any potential situation. Going forward, school staff will build on this work, and focus on creating a strong sense of community and robust home-school connections. They plan to further clarify and document the referral process, provide professional development to support emotional regulation in students, have a team participate in a trauma course, form a School Culture and Discipline Committee, refine the SST process, and develop an action plan to address the subgroup disproportionality. Goals include an increase in staff knowledge

and feeling supported in office referrals, a decrease in the number of referrals, and closing the gap between subgroups.

In academics, the school focused in the past on implementing inclusion practices for special education and has made progress in that area. Principal Seward shared MCAS data by grade, for both ELA and Math, noting the large percentage of students in the *Partially Meeting* category, and other district assessment data. The school plans to focus on classroom assessments to adjust instruction, strategically using interventions, improve collaboration for teaching teams, use benchmark assessments for early identification, and provide professional development on small group instruction. Preliminary benchmark assessment results demonstrate progress, and the school shared 2-year academic goals focused on student growth in these benchmark assessments. Meeting participants discussed the link between social-emotional learning and academics, the school's commitment to Second Step and Responsive Classroom, and how this can support students' SEL and their achievement.

Next, Somerville High School staff presented their school improvement plan, starting with information on areas of success, such as the graduation rate and dropout rate, as well as areas to address, including the chronic absenteeism rate (22.2%) and the in-school and out-of-school suspension rates (6.1% and 3.2% respectively). The disproportionate rates for particular subgroups of students were also noted. It was shared that most suspensions are due to cutting class, which can lead to class/school avoidance.

Staff noted the rising importance of particular skills for students, e.g. critical thinking, and then shared areas of challenge within the current high school practices and structures to support the development of these skills, including the lack of real-world opportunities, a rigid schedule and not enough time for teachers to collaborate with each other. This has led to a focus on three key areas: 1) student choice, 2) personalization, and 3) scheduling flexibility. This planning work, supported by a \$300,000 Barr Foundation Grant awarded in October 2017, includes a planning team, four subcommittees, focus groups, professional development, and community events to gather stakeholder input and explore new ideas (for more details on this process from prior EP meeting, see March 19, 2018 meeting minutes).

Each subcommittee researched a particular focus area, including visiting at least one other school, and identified recommended action steps. The subcommittee focused on out-of-school learning (OSL) recommends a four-phase process for every student, leading to a significant OSL experience. The performance-based assessment subcommittee recommends a multi-year implementation process leading to interdisciplinary PBAs in all grades, and projects in junior and senior connecting to their OSL experience and a newly developed *Habits of the SHS Graduate* schema. The personalization subcommittee recommends a daily 30-minute block of *Highlander Community Time* that would be required, credit bearing, and supported by all SHS faculty. A sample schedule was provided, with potential activities. This is different from and would replace the current advisory in that it would be much more frequent and much more structured. Finally, the scheduling subcommittee is exploring the idea of moving from a semester model to a trimester model, to increase flexibility for students and better meet student and teacher needs. For example, this would reduce the number of classes a student has from seven to five, per trimester, and would create a free block once per year. This shift would also allow a student to restart a course sooner, if necessary, than the current schedule allows. Teachers would teach three out of five classes, allowing for more planning time.

Next steps for this work include using stakeholder feedback to finalize the proposed recommendations. Final recommendations are subject to addressing any contractual issues and School Committee approval. A \$500,000 implementation-planning grant was submitted to the Barr Foundation in April to support this continued work.

Committee members and district staff then discussed other questions that came up related to addressing the perceived division between general education and special education, the pilot of blending college-prep and honors classes, college completion rates, and dual-enrollment opportunities.

Finally, Carrie Normand made a motion to approve minutes from 2/25/19, 3/6/19, and 3/18/19, which was seconded by Andre Green. Motion passed unanimously.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:59pm.

MOTION: Motion by Ms. O'Sullivan, seconded by Dr. Ackman, to accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction of the Whole of April 3, 2019.

D. School Committee Meeting for Finance and Facilities Meeting of the Whole: April 10, 2019 (Mr. Futrell)

Mr. Futrell gave his report.

MOTION: Motion by Mr. Futrell, seconded by Ms. Palmer, to accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Finance and Facilities Meeting of the Whole of April 10, 2019

MOTION: Motion by Mr. Futrell to accept bill rolls for 2019.

Motion approved via voice vote.

E. School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction: April 22, 2019 (Ms. O'Sullivan)

Education Programs & Instruction - Meeting Minutes - April 22, 2019

The Education Programs & Instruction Subcommittee held a meeting on April 22, 2019. Subcommittee members in attendance were Paula G. O'Sullivan, Emily Ackman and Laura Pitone. Participating district staff included Assistant Superintendent Almi Abeyta, Data Coordinator Kenya Avant and Innovation Specialist Jason Behrens. Ms. O'Sullivan called the meeting to order at 6:14pm. There were two topics on the agenda, an update on the SPS Calculus Project and on the work of the Innovation Specialist.

The Calculus Project (TCP) is an initiative that started in Brookline, MA to dramatically increase the number of students of color and low-income students who complete AP Calculus in high school. TCP is now in multiple districts within and outside of MA. Program components include an academic excellence philosophy, a whole child/healthy child focus, and a strong peer support network.

TCP was first implemented in Somerville in 2017, in alignment with the School Committee goal #1 (increase achievement and access for all students, and reduce all performance gaps by half). District staff shared baseline math course failure rates from 2016, which showed disproportionate rates for African-American students. Enrollment data for advanced math courses and performance in those classes showed lower enrollment rates for African-American students and higher percentages receiving a D or F in those classes. This project seeks to positively impact these statistics.

In 2018, there were 66 rising 7th, 8th, and 9th graders participating in the 3-week summer program. Each cohort of about 20 students works with a lead teacher, co-teacher, and two peer leaders (SHS students). Demographic data of 2018 participants was shared, and a request for attendance data was made. The daily schedule includes breakfast, lunch, and three hours of math instruction, along with breaks and outdoor time. During school year, about 45 minutes of math practice twice a week.

The content curriculum was created by SPS Director of K-8 Curriculum Uri Harel and SPS 7th and 8th grade teachers. The program also includes the "Pride Curriculum" from TCP, which program leaders are looking to expand. Initial data from the first year cohort demonstrated improvement in MCAS SGP for participants compared to comparable population, not just in math but in ELA as well.

Looking forward, staff are getting ready for summer 2019, by identifying rising 7th graders, engaging in the hiring process, and meeting with the Black Student Union to review the Pride curriculum. They expect to enroll about 90-100 students this summer. Program leaders identified the need to fully establish the year-long program to keep students engaged and supported. They are working on identifying other funding sources to support this. They also would like to hire two additional students in administrative roles, and are looking to potentially move the student positions into the Mayor's summer job program.

Due to time constraints, the second agenda item was tabled until the next meeting. With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:55pm.

MOTION: Motion by Ms. O'Sullivan, seconded by Dr. Ackman, to accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction Committee of the Whole of April 22, 2019.

F. School Committee Meeting for Finance and Facilities Meeting of the Whole: May 7, 2019 (Mr. Futrell)

Mr. Futrell was not in attendance for this meeting, so the report is delivered by vice chair Mr. Green.

MOTION: Motion by Mr. Green, seconded by Dr. Ackman, to accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Finance and Facilities Committee of the Whole of May 7, 2019

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Hiring for Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, instruction, and Assessment

B. MCAS Hold Harmless Resolution

Ms. Normand opened by saying that at our last School Committee meeting, Ms. Palmer put forward a resolution that was tabled.

Ms. O'Sullivan has offered some suggested amendments to Ms. Palmer's resolution.

Ms. O'Sullivan understands that students were harmed by this question. She is worried that students will not receive adequate support to address the issue.

MOTION: Motion by Ms. O'Sullivan to put forth the resolution with her amendments as a second version.

Ms. Normand said they would take up the resolution Ms. Palmer put forward first.

Ms. Palmer is happy to accept the friendly changes proposed by Ms. O'Sullivan related to paragraph 3. All of the changes in paragraph 4. And the two changes starting with Whereas in paragraph 5. Other than that, she has a lot of questions and concerns about Ms. O'Sullivan's revisions.

Ms. Pitone is struggling to understand the paragraphs.

Ms. Palmer said there is the title and then 13 paragraphs. The 3rd "whereas" is fine. The 4th "where" is fine. In paragraph 5, I'm fine with some of the changes. In paragraph 12, I would ask the amender to explain what it means for DESE to "thoroughly examine".

Mr. Futrell asked a question to Ms. Palmer. We are asking DESE to take action in an unenforceable resolution. How does accountability play out from one clause to the next?

Ms. Palmer replied this is a political resolution. I favor direct and clear language that makes our point to DESE.

Dr. Ackman asked if the amendments of paragraph 9 are friendly or not?

Ms. Palmer said paragraph 9 is an unfriendly amendment.

Ms. Ballantyne referred to paragraph 10; the power here is to make a change is the legislation or Mass Board of Education?

Ms. Skipper mentioned this power is vested with the Board of Education.

Ms. Skipper stated that both versions of the resolutions have positive aspects to them. It would be helpful to come to an agreement between the two. Most of Ms. Palmer's language, I agree with calling out how egregious this was. But I also agree with Ms. O'Sullivan, the part that resonated with us from a district perspective was in finding the additional information about what exactly the Department of Ed has done for steps and what it is willing to do. We also need to get at the crux of why this happened in the first place. This could be training or communication to fix going forward.

Mr. Green made a point of information to President Ballantyne. Massachusetts state law requires some measure of competency to issue a diploma. This has been the 10th grade MCAS. I have personal qualms about the proposed Stanford analysis.

Ms. O'Sullivan explained that for paragraph 10, it's in both state law and the regulation. It's from the Board of Education where the relief must come. I'm not a psychometrician but I believe it is possible to rigorously study the impact of the question.

Mr. Futrell added I appreciate this conversation. When my colleague brought this up, it was new to me. Does our district have a position on this question being included in an ELA classroom for example?

Ms. Skipper said context is important. Class discussion is different from high stakes test taking. The experience of taking this as part of a test could be very difficult for students.

Mr. Futrell feels a little hesitant to back the stronger resolution. I appreciate Ms. O'Sullivan's resolution — and her look at the process.

Mr. Green commented that the author of the "Underground Railroad" said he was appalled and disgusted by the passage used on the MCAS. In the context of a class, this would be a good discussion. In the context of a test, this is a terrible and unconscionable question.

Mr. Futrell responded to Mr. Green, I appreciate your underlying point. We wouldn't ask authors how we teach children.

Ms. Normand intervened; I want to reign this in. Let's go through the resolution and amendments point by point.

Ms. Skipper is worried about whether you can quantify the impact for a high stakes test. This is supposed to be summative of student's knowledge and experience.

Ms. Pitone thanked everyone for this important discussion.

Ms. O'Sullivan agreed, let's review the amendment line by line.

Ms. Palmer then read the proposed resolution with Ms. O'Sullivan's friendly amendments.

RESOLUTION TO HOLD HARMLESS ~~Class of 2021 ELA Competency Determination~~ 2019 10th GRADE MCAS

DUE TO RACIST ~~racially biased and insensitive~~ QUESTION

~~WHEREAS the graduation requirement makes the tenth grade MCAS exam one of the highest stakes exams most Massachusetts students take; and~~

~~WHEREAS teachers, families, and schools all invest time and resources to give students the best possible chance at success on the exam; and~~

~~WHEREAS students have a right to be able to demonstrate their full knowledge, skills, and understanding on the MCAS; and~~

~~WHEREAS, the recent 2019 10th grade MCAS English exam contained an essay a question that required students to write, in response to an excerpt from a novel, a journal entry from the perspective of an openly racist character; and~~

~~WHEREAS, DESE was unable to defend the question, quickly moving ed to not have it count in student scores, and~~

~~WHEREAS, we only discovered this because students had the courage to violate the rules about discussing specific MCAS questions, and~~

~~WHEREAS, research shows that exposure to negative stereotypes can have a negative impact on student performance, and~~

~~WHEREAS, the impact of the racist question on performance cannot be quantified;~~

~~WHEREAS, DESE has commissioned external researchers from Stanford University to run an independent analysis to determine the impact of this test item on students' performance.~~

NOW, THEREFORE, be it:

RESOLVED: That, **if the Stanford analysis determines negative impact**, the Somerville School Committee calls on ~~DESE~~ **the MA Board of Education and/or MA Legislators** to exempt students who took the test with the rejected question from ~~the ELA component of the graduation exam~~ **competency determination** requirement **(required by M.G.L. c. 69, § 1D)**; AND FURTHER

~~RESOLVED: That the Somerville School Committee calls for DESE to immediately implement a policy of releasing old MCAS questions, so that there can be transparency to prevent such egregious errors in the future; AND~~

RESOLVED: That the Somerville School Committee calls for DESE to thoroughly examine the process for developing and reviewing test items, in particular the training and oversight of the Bias & Sensitivity Committee.

THAT: a copy of this resolution be delivered to DESE, the Governor and the Somerville state and local legislative delegations, and otherwise widely distributed.

VOTED:

DATE:

BY THE: Somerville School Committee

Mayor Curtatone suggested that parliamentary procure would have us go line for line.

MOTION: Motion by Ms. O'Sullivan, seconded by Ms. Pitone to amend the title of this resolution to read RESOLUTION TO HOLD HARMLESS CLASS OF 2021 ELA COMPETENCY DETERMINATION DUE TO RACIALLY BIASED AND INSENSITIVE QUESTION.

Dr. Ackman started the discussion, of all the amendments, these are the ones I disagree with most strongly. DESE and the Commissioner have done a poor job responding to this question. We need a strong response because the response from DESE has been poor.

Ms. Pitone argued what is this resolution about: is it against MCAS? DESE? Or a particular racist question? I agree that DESE has made mistakes but wonder whether we really want to focus on DESE with this resolution. My druthers are to focus on the question.

Mr. Green asked how is the title change different in its focus?

Ms. Pitone reiterated, do we want to focus on the ELA competency determination? Do we want to be brand to focus on MCAS or focus on the question? My convictions are not particularly strong.

Mr. Green noted there are two separate conversations here. I feel strongly about calling this racist — not racially insensitive. "Racially insensitive" language is in response to white fragility.

Mr. Futrell sees there are strong feelings but isn't clear on what we're calling racist here.

Mr. Futrell continued, then the whole test is racist.

AMENDMENT TO THE AMENDMENT: by Ms. Pitone, to amend Ms. O'Sullivan's amendment to read RESOLUTION TO HOLD HARMLESS CLASS OF 2021 ELA COMPETENCY DETERMINATION DUE TO RACIST QUESTION, seconded by Dr. Ackman.

ROLL CALL Vote:

Ms. Palmer suggested a friendly amendment to include (MCAS) before the vote.

Ms. O'Sullivan is happy to withdraw her amendment. Ms. Pitone withdraws her amendment. The title change is friendly to read, RESOLUTION TO HOLD HARMLESS CLASS OF 2021 ELA COMPETENCY DETERMINATION (10th Grade MCAS) DUE TO RACIST QUESTION

Mr. Futrell pointed out that we just crossed the 45-minute mark and haven't agreed on this title. He suggested, maybe we visit this in a smaller group.

Ms. Palmer said we should continue to do this.

MOTION: Motion by Ms. O'Sullivan to strike paragraph one, WHEREAS the graduation requirement makes the tenth grade MCAS exam one of the highest stakes exams most Massachusetts students take; and, seconded by Ms. Pitone.

Ms. O'Sullivan explained, as previously stated she is trying to keep this on the issue at hand, not trying to make a big statement about what the test may or may not be.

Mr. Green responded that the only reason this matters is because the state has consequences for the student, it's important to name the stakes for these students.

Superintendent Skipper would agree with the amendment if the original line read the highest, she in fact agreed one of the highest is appropriate.

ROLL CALL Vote: No carries.

MOTION: Motion by Ms. O'Sullivan to strike the second WHEREAS and replace it with the third WHEREAS.

Ms. O'Sullivan withdraws her motion on paragraph two.

The 3rd and 4th WHEREAS are accepted as friendly amendments.

MOTION: Motion by Ms. O'Sullivan, seconded by Mr. Futrell to strike "was unable to defend the question" on paragraph 5.

Ms. Pitone thinks saying DESE didn't try to defend the question seems like finger wagging.

Dr. Ackman is in favor of the stronger language.

"Moving" to "moved" and adding "in student scores" were accepted as friendly.

ROLL CALL Vote: Yes, carries

Ms. O'Sullivan withdraws the change to the 6th whereas.

MOTION: Motion by Ms. O'Sullivan, seconded by Mr. Futrell to strike paragraph 8 and replace it with paragraph 9.

Ms. Pitone imagines that if DESE send Stanford to do the work, they should be able to do the work. She was also compelled by Supt. Skipper's representation of individual students and who would be impacted.

Dr. Ackman personally knows two student affected by this question.

Ms. O'Sullivan said the analysis would be done at the student level.

Mr. Futrell is in favor of this amendment.

Mr. Green is struck that his colleagues think we can measure racist impact. There is no control group. There is no way of knowing how they would have done otherwise, so we have to make assumptions.

Ms. Normand stated if one kid doesn't get a scholarship, it won't be statistically significant. But it will be significant for that kid.

ROLL CALL Vote: No carries.

Ms. O'Sullivan withdraws her motion.

MOTION: Motion by Mr. Futrell, seconded by Ms. Pitone for an addition to line 8 "Whereas DESE has commissioned external researchers from Stanford University to run an independent analysis."

Ms. Palmer asked if we know where these researchers are?

Ms. O'Sullivan commented she did not track down the researchers.

ROLL CALL Vote: No Carries

Ms. Palmer accepts all friendly amendments to paragraph 10, to read, "RESOLVED: That, the Somerville School Committee calls on the MA Board of Education and/or MA Legislators to exempt students who took the test with the rejected question of the ELA component from the Competency Determination (required by M.G.L. c. 69, § 1D) ; AND FURTHER"

MOTION: Motion by Ms. O'Sullivan, seconded by Ms. Pitone to delete paragraph 11.

Superintendent Skipper said the one caveat to this is that they don't release questions in trial.

ROLL CALL Vote: Yes, carries.

Ms. Palmer accepted the entire resolution as amended.

Roll CALL Vote: on amended resolution: yes, carries, with Dan Futrell and Paula O'Sullivan voting against.

C. Field Trips (Recommended action: approval)
April 2, 2020 – April 5, 2020

SHS Chorus and Honors Chorus will travel to New Orleans, LA for a national choral competition. Transportation via airplane. Student cost is TBD.

MOTION: Motion by Dr. Ackman to approve field trips, seconded by Mr. Green.
Motion approved via voice vote.

Ms. Pitone asked what the cost to students is?

Superintendent Skipper replied that this is very far off so the Music Dept. doesn't yet know the full cost. We will fundraise so all students can come.

Ms. Pitone would like to hear about systemic reporting back. What happens when someone else replaces Ms. Mosby.

D. 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
Monetary	Michael and Callie Wiser	Somerville, MA	\$100	Lunch Debt Donation

MOTION: Motion by Ms. Palmer, to accept with gratitude the donations, seconded by Mr. Green.
Motion approved via voice vote.

Mr. Green would love an update on the current status of lunch debt.

Ms. Pitone asked how can people donate?

Ms. Pitone would like to thank Dr. Curley for creating a system for lunch debt donations.

VIII. ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS

Ms. Palmer

June 9th is the Walk to Save Our Homes. Please come and donate if you can.

Ms. Pitone

Is requesting an update from the parking task force.

Dr. Ackman

Is requesting feedback for the Superintendent evaluation a week from Friday.

Ms. Pitone asked if staff input will be put into the evaluation?

Dr. Ackman replied not this year. I look forward to having this conversation. Based on research, there isn't a significant and valid way to collect staff input.

Ms. Pitone added that this is about respecting staff.

Ms. Ballantyne

Previously asked the School Committee attorney about when we can discuss and deliberate Powderhouse Studios. How and in what forum. I also have another resolution, which I will submit at a later date.

Mr. Futrell is eager to have the Powerhouse Studios deliberation discussion as well.

Ms. Palmer:

Request to the Chair for Lydia Torre's contact information, the student a made a public comment at both the last meeting and this one. Can we get the student's contact information to the members? And let us know if the student's agenda item could go on the next meeting agenda.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:51 p.m.

Related Documents

Agenda

Dr. Abeyta's Resignation Letter

Mr. Mazza's Resume

DESE Important Announcement Regarding the 10th Grade ELA MCAS

MCAS Harmless Resolution

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

AMENDED 05/17/19

REGULAR MEETING – MAY 20, 2019 – 7:00 P.M.

Somerville Public Schools - School Committee Vision Statement/Goals

We believe in developing the whole child - the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical potential of all students - by providing students with the skills, opportunities, and resources that will nurture innovative ideas, foster pride in diversity, inspire students to become lifelong learners and empower them to enrich their communities.

- Goal #1: Increase achievement and access for all students. Reduce all performance gaps by half.
- Goal #2: Develop and implement a comprehensive PreK-12 social-emotional learning framework that provides students with the skills they need for social and academic success.
- Goal #3: Increase engagement with the community to reflect the community in which we live.
- Goal #4: Continue to develop and implement innovative ways of measuring student academic performance and school quality such as formative assessment, performance-based tasks, and whole quality indicators.
- Goal #5: Develop a comprehensive plan for Universal Kindergarten Readiness that supports intellectual, physical, and social/emotional growth from birth to Pre-K.
- Goal #6: Develop and implement a strategy to recruit, develop, and retain a diverse and talented staff.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

- I. CALL TO ORDER**
Call to order with a moment of silence and a salute to the flag of the United States of America.
- II. AWARDS AND CITATIONS**
- A. Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents Awards**
- Maxwell Nadeau
 - Henry Zou
- III. REPORT OF STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES**
- IV. PUBLIC COMMENT**
- V. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT**
- A. District Report**
- FY2020 Budget Update
 - Somerville High School Building Project
 - Career Technical Education
- B. Personnel Report**
- VI. REPORT OF SUBCOMMITTEES**
- G. School Committee Meeting for Rules Management:** April 1, 2019 (Ms. Palmer)
MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction of the Whole of April 1, 2019.
- H. School Committee Meeting for Rules Management:** May 13, 2019 (Ms. Palmer)
MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction Committee of the Whole of May 13, 2019.

I. School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction: April 3, 2019 (Ms. O’Sullivan)

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction of the Whole of April 3, 2019.

J. School Committee Meeting for Finance and Facilities Meeting of the Whole: April 10, 2019 (Mr. Futrell)

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction Committee of the Whole of April 10, 2019

K. School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction: April 22, 2019 (Ms. O’Sullivan)

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction Committee of the Whole of April 22, 2019.

L. School Committee Meeting for Finance and Facilities Meeting of the Whole: May 7, 2019 (Mr. Futrell)

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Finance and Facilities Committee of the Whole of May 7, 2019

VII. NEW BUSINESS

E. Hiring for Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

F. MCAS Hold Harmless Resolution

G. Field Trips (Recommended action: approval)

April 2, 2020 – April 5, 2020

SHS Chorus and Honors Chorus will travel to New Orleans, LA for a national choral competition. Transportation via airplane. Student cost is TBD.

H. Acceptance of Donations (Recommended action: approval)

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Monetary	Michael and Callie Wisner	Somerville, MA	\$100	Lunch Debt Donation

VIII. ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS

IX. CONDOLENCES

X. ADJOURNMENT

Almudena G. Abeyta, Ed.D.

May 17, 2019

Dear Mary,

Thank you so much for your support and patience during the process of applying for a superintendency. I appreciate all that you have done for me. I am resigning from my position as Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment for Somerville Public Schools effective May 17, 2019. Per our conversation today, my last official day will be July 31, 2019.

Sincerely,

Almi G. Abeyta

Almi G. Abeyta, Ed.D.

CHAD MAZZA

Innovative and Energetic School Principal *Proven educator with a commitment to improved student performance, rigorous standards, social and emotional development, trauma sensitive practices, mindfulness and academic excellence*

Dynamic professional with expertise in leading bilingual, special, and regular education students, staff and daily operations of a PreK-8 urban school. Focus on top academic performance and high standards of operation. Expertise in turning around low-performing schools. Demonstrated success in development of key support services and instructional programs focused on academic improvement, strategic reform, and student achievement. **Areas of excellence:**

- **Student Achievement • Policies/ Procedures • Fiscal Management**
- **Performance Management • Professional Development • Civic Involvement**
- **Data-Driven Decision Making • Parental Involvement • Community Partnerships**

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

WINTER HILL COMMUNITY INNOVATION SCHOOL

Somerville, MA

Principal

2012 - Present

Manage daily activities and ensure continuous improvement of this PreK-8 urban school with an enrollment of 475 students, including the district middle school SEIP Program, K-8 AIM Program, 57 teachers, 18 teaching assistants and 2 academic coaches. Administer the school budget and authorize expenditures. Set rigorous expectations and implement a School Improvement Plan with targeted improvement goals and objectives aligned with district benchmarks. Standardize performance by fostering best teaching practices and adherence to school policies and procedures. Foster inclusion through newsletters and bulletins; strengthen school culture by instituting a Dress Code.

2017 Pozen Prize for Innovation Schools Recipient:

<https://www.tbf.org/news-and-insights/press-releases/2017/may/winter-hill-wins-pozen-prize>

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/teachers-struggle-new-default-mindset-after-florida-shooting-n852796> <http://neatoday.org/2013/09/13/in-massachusetts-education-innovation-is-in-full-force-2/>

LT. ELMER J. MCMAHON SCHOOL

Holyoke, MA

Principal

2011 - 2012

DR. MARCELLA R. KELLY SCHOOL

Holyoke, MA

Principal

2006 – 2011

Managed daily activities and ensure continuous improvement of this K-8 urban school with an enrollment of 575 students (52% ELL, 35% mobility rate), 55 teachers, 12 teaching assistants and 2 academic coaches. Administered the school budget and authorize expenditures. Set rigorous expectations and implement a School Improvement Plan with targeted improvement goals and objectives aligned with district benchmarks. Standardized performance by fostering best teaching practices and adherence to school policies and procedures. Fostered inclusion through newsletters and bulletins; enhanced school image by initiating community-sponsored events such as Kelly Clean-Up Day and Community Reading Day.

Delivered Results

- Increased student performance on MCAS and district assessment causing a shift in school performance from underperforming to adequate yearly progress rating; implemented the School Improvement Plan with a daily skills block for all students.
- Instituted before and after school tutoring and mandatory Saturday School for underperforming students.
- Reduced disciplinary incidents, including violence, each year. Decreased suspensions and office referrals by 25% yearly by implementing the School-Wide Behavior Management Plan. Increased yearly parent participation by 10%.
- Implemented rigorous literacy program, earning a Category I Reading First School designation by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for outstanding improvement in Reading.
- Spearheaded program to improve health education through the encouraging student participation in physical fitness; awarded Bronze Medal for Health and Wellness by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
- Launched an Instructional Leadership Team to assist in the implementation of the school's instructional programs. Initiated a Data Team to assess overall data and facilitate customized instructional plans.
- Provided counseling to over 50 students yearly through a variety of social service agencies.

Notable Achievements

- Devised a school schedule focused on the maximization of instructional time.
- Demonstrated the need for additional ESL certified staff and reevaluated the use of financial expenditures to utilize staff to focus on ESL instruction in grades K-8.
- Implemented school-wide Standards-Based Instruction.
- Completed ELL Category I and II trainings.
- Created Professional Learning Communities in grades K-8.
- Implemented English Language Development (ELD) classes for Beginning and Early Intermediate ELL students in grades 5-8.
- Implemented MSL Math classes for Beginning and Early Intermediate ELL students in grades 6-8.
- Developed and implemented School Safety Plan.
- Member of the High School Graduation Rate Committee for Chicopee, Holyoke and Springfield.
- 2007 graduate of Leadership Holyoke.
- 2006 graduate of the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) program.
- Completed the following trainings with Dr. William Ribas:
 - Effective Supervision and Evaluation
 - The Unsatisfactory and Barely Satisfactory Teacher
 - Effectively Observing, Developing, Assessing, Documenting and Conferencing about Classroom Teaching

BRAYTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

North Adams, MA

Principal

2005 - 2006

Managed daily activities and ensured continuous improvement of this K-5 school with an enrollment of 368 students, the district's only Pre-K classroom for at risk children, a LINCS Parent Center, behavioral and emotional transition classroom, life skills classroom, early childhood autistic classroom, the largest ELL population and only ELL Center, 39 teachers, and 30 teaching assistants. Administered the school budget and authorized expenditures. Set rigorous expectations and implemented a School Improvement Plan with targeted improvement goals and objectives aligned with district benchmarks. Standardized performance by fostering best teaching practices and encouraging adherence to school policies and procedures. Fostered inclusion through newsletters and bulletins; enhanced school image by initiating community-sponsored events.

Delivered Results

- Increased student performance on MCAS and district assessment causing a shift in school performance from underperforming to adequate yearly progress rating.
- Implemented rigorous literacy program, earning a Category I Reading First School designation by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for outstanding improvement in Reading.

Notable Achievements

- Devised a school schedule focused on the maximization of instructional time.

- Implemented school-wide Standards-Based Instruction.
- Developed and monitored Student Success Plans.
- Developed and implemented School Safety Plan.
- Created Professional Learning Communities in grades K-8.

MORNINGSIDE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Pittsfield, MA

**Acting Principal
14, 2002**

February 1, 2002 – March

Assumed all roles and responsibilities of the principal for this pre K-5 school that housed 585 students, 32 teachers and 30 paraprofessionals.

School/Community Coordinator

1995 – 2005

Served as assistant to the principal and managed daily activities in the building. Facilitated Bay State Reader's Program. Scheduled staff and student activities. Developed, implemented, supervised and evaluated all after school programs. Developed and implemented staff in-service trainings. Coordinated and scheduled DARE, SIDE and Fire Safety programs. Supervised the Strong Families, Strong Kids program. Promoted positive behavior in staff and students. Served as a liaison between the school, business partner KB Toys and the community to foster collaborative learning. Coordinated and distributed the MCAS test. Coordinated and scheduled community use of the school. Ex-Officio of the Neighborhood Advisory Council. Member of the School Council and the Literacy Team.

Notable Achievements

- Managed the Connected for Success Program, a 13-week Curriculum Based Measurements (CBM) program to track improvement in number of words read correctly within a specified timeframe. The program resulted in a significant increase in all children in words read correctly. Most notably, grade 4 students enrolled posted higher scores on MCAS.
- Coordinated and supervised the School-Linked Services program, a contract between Morningside and Berkshire Center for Families and Children, from July 2000 to June 2002. Hired and supervised a Family Liaison, assessed the needs of children, their families and the surrounding community.
- Member the Massachusetts Department of Education's Panel Review and Fact Finding Teams during the 2004-2005 school year. Observed classrooms, evaluated teachers, and facilitated staff and student focus group interviews. Conducted in-depth analysis of School Improvement Plans of schools listed as underperforming and used data to suggest changes.

EDUCATION

Master of Education Major: Administration May 2000 American International College, Springfield, MA **GPA:** 3.75

Bachelor of Science Major: Elementary Education December 1993 North Adams State College, North Adams, MA **GPA:** 3.30

CERTIFICATIONS

Elementary 1 – 6 (License # 314924) Professional Principal/Assistant Principal Pre-K – 6 Professional Principal/Assistant Principal 5 – 8 Professional Principal/Assistant Principal 9 – 12 Professional Superintendent/Assistant Superintendent All Levels Professional

*News from Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley & the
MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

On the Desktop – March 31, 2019

Important Announcement Regarding the 10th Grade English Language Arts MCAS Test

Dear Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, and Assistant Superintendents,

Late last week, the Department received reports from several school administrators about reactions from some students to one of the three essay questions on the 10th grade English language arts MCAS test. The administrators reported that students had encountered material that affected their ability to be tested fairly.

The Department has a thorough process for vetting test questions that includes review by educators, review by a committee that looks at possible biases, and field tests of all questions before they are used toward students' scores. However, out of an abundance of caution and in the interest of student fairness, we have decided not to use the results from this particular question as part of students' scores. Students who have already answered the question will not have it scored, and students who take the makeup test this week will be instructed not to answer that question.

I am making this decision now, because we are nearing the end of the testing period and in recognition of the high-stakes nature of the 10th grade test. The issue of what is appropriate content for future tests warrants further discussion among students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the public at large. We plan to have such a discussion at the appropriate time.

We cannot say more about the question at this time, because it is one of several questions associated with a reading passage. The other questions will still be scored for all students, whether they have already completed the test or are taking a makeup test this week. After all testing is completed, the question will be released along with the other questions on the 10th grade test.

We are confident that scores for the 10th grade English language arts MCAS test will be fair and reliable. The test will still have a similar ratio of writing to other content as in past years, even with this essay question removed.

Separately from this email, we will send principals specific directions to distribute to test administrators instructing students who are taking a makeup test this week to disregard the question. If you have any questions, please contact Student Assessment Services at 781-338- 3625 or mcas@doe.mass.edu.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

RESOLUTION TO HOLD HARMLESS 2019 10th GRADE MCAS

DUE TO RACIST QUESTION

WHEREAS the graduation requirement makes the tenth grade MCAS exam one of the highest stakes exams most Massachusetts students take; and

WHEREAS teachers, families, and schools all invest time and resources to give students the best possible chance at success on the exam; and

WHEREAS, the recent 10th grade MCAS English exam contained an essay that required students to write a journal entry from the perspective of an openly racist character; and

WHEREAS, DESE was unable to defend the question, quickly moving to not have it count, and

WHEREAS, we only discovered this because students had the courage to violate the rules about discussing specific MCAS questions, and

WHEREAS, research shows that exposure to negative stereotypes can have a negative impact on student performance, and

WHEREAS, the impact of the racist question on performance cannot be quantified;

NOW, THEREFORE, be it:

RESOLVED: That the Somerville School Committee calls on DESE to exempt students who took the test with the rejected question from the graduation exam requirement; AND FURTHER

RESOLVED: That the Somerville School Committee calls for DESE to immediately implement a policy of releasing old MCAS questions, so that there can be transparency to prevent such egregious errors in the future; AND

THAT: a copy of this resolution be delivered to DESE, the Governor and the Somerville state and local legislative delegations, and otherwise widely distributed.

VOTED:

DATE:

BY THE: Somerville School Committee