

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

September 9, 2019 – Regular Meeting

7:00 p.m. – Central Office Main Conference Room – 8 Bonair Street

Members present: Ms. Palmer, Ms. Normand, Ms. O’Sullivan, Mr. Green and President Ballantyne.

Members absent: Dr. Ackman, Ms. Pitone and Mayor Curtatone

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 – 5 –Ms. Palmer, Ms. Normand, Alderman Ballantyne, Ms. O’Sullivan and Mr. Green. ABSENT – 3 – Ms. Pitone, Dr. Ackman and Mayor Curtatone

II. REPORT OF STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

No students present.

Mr. Green asked if new student representatives were chosen and when they would start attending meetings.

Superintendent Skipper responded that Principal Lagambina is in the process of interviewing students, they will be in attendance at the following regular meeting, scheduled for September 23, 2019.

Chair Normand added that at the previous meeting Ms. Pitone raised questions about the process of how student reps are to be elected, there will be further discussion on this topic at a future meeting.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

Abbe Cohen Dvornik of ward 6 shared her support for the new Homework Policy and asked that the policy passed in the spring go into effect as soon as possible. She added that there is a ton of data which shows that homework doesn’t help. Homework is an equalizer, we know homework impacts aren’t the same for every child; some kids do well with homework and others need more reinforcements, some kids struggle to find a productive learning environment to work in, some kids don’t struggle at all and some kids struggle silently and turn in amazing homework, but don’t sleep or play outside or miss creative activities with families. She is here because homework affected her family in a negative way and although she did not share her personal story, she believes that the homework policy passed in the spring is a step in the right direction.

IV. NEW BUSINESS ITEMS A ND B TAKEN OUT OF ORDER

A. Election Process for Anticipated School Committee Vacancy

B. Ward 2 Vacancy Nominations and Vote

Chair Normand stated that Mr. Frank Wright did an amazing job at combining a process that meets the City Charter, School Committee Policy, and Roberts Rules. Mr. Wright’s memo is included in this packet should anyone need a quick review. She reminded members that everyone would write their name as well as the name of the person they are voting for on an index card, she will collect the cards and read them out loud stating the members name and their vote. She asked if there were any questions.

Mr. Green asked if they would count the majority of votes from the whole committee or the majority of votes present.

Chair Normand replied the majority of votes present.

Chair Normand then asked for nominations.

MOTION: Motion by Mr. Green to nominate Ilana Krepchin for Ward 2 Vacancy.

Members casted their votes and chair Normand read them out loud as follows:

President Ballantyne – Ilana Krepchin
Ms. O’Sullivan – Ilana Krepchin
Ms. Palmer – Ilana Krepchin
Mr. Green – Ilana Krepchin
Ms. Normand – Ilana Krepchin

Ms. Krepchin was elected as the new Ward 2 School Committee member. Chair Normand invited Ms. Krepchin to say a few words.

Ms. Krepchin introduced herself to the camera and thanked everyone for the opportunity to represent constituents from Ward 2 on the School Committee, she added that she looks forward to working with current members of the committee.

Chair Normand welcomed her and thanked her for stepping up and taking this leadership role. We appreciate that you were already committed to the two-year term, but to step in now, sort of mid-year is very helpful to the committee.

Superintendent Skipper also welcomed and thanked Ms. Krepchin.

President Ballantyne asked about further procedure and when Ms. Krepchin could join them at the table.

Chair Normand explained that Ms. Krepchin first needs to be sworn in by Mr. Long. She will schedule it within the next two weeks so that Ms. Krepchin could join the table at the next regular School Committee meeting.

Chair Normand continued with the announcement of changes and additions to the subcommittees. With Mr. Futrell gone Chair Normand named Mr. Green Chair of the Finance and Facilities Subcommittee for the remainder of this term, Ms. Krepchin will fill the third seat on the Finance and Facilities Subcommittee. They are currently seeking volunteers who might want to replace Mr. Futrell in the Rules Subcommittee.

Chair Normand then introduced to the following item on the agenda, the report of the Superintendent.

V. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT

A. District Report

- 2019-2020 Student Enrollment

Superintendent Skipper started with a quick update on student enrollment.

We have about 170 students more at this point of the beginning of the year than we normally do, which is exciting on so many levels. There is definitely an increase on the west side, where we saw higher numbers particularly with kindergarten, preschool and first grade. We are working with families that have about another four or five days before they get back from other countries, we have some families that are actually in the Caribbean and can't get back. So it will really be about four or five more days before all the numbers are completely settled. Everyone we spoke to is safe, it's more the logistics of the travel that's an issue. But that said this is the time to undertake an enrollment study. For two years in a row we've been seeing two things; one is definitely on the west side of the city a bump in the younger student enrollment, and then among our immigrant students we're definitely seeing a bump in newcomers. And so I think it's perfect timing to be able to have an entity come in and join us to do an enrollment study, do some projections based on consensus within the city to see what we're going to need to do as

district and as a school committee to meet the needs of the city. I'll have an update with additional numbers, come the next School Committee meeting, at that point we will also have done discharges.

Mr. Green mentioned that we know the agency that MASC uses for general projections, by their own admission, doesn't do economic projections and struggles with change in economy in Somerville so he assumes we are looking for a company to do that better.

Superintendent Skipper asked Chief of Staff Dr. Curley to give a quick update on that. She added that we are developing a scope of service work for enrollment and we have 6 to 7 companies that we think would fit our needs.

Dr. Curley reiterated her statement and added that we have a final scope of service that is with the finance department right now. We've identified companies nationally and locally that do this kind of work that can give us a sense of enrollment projections and work with the city in terms of housing stock and future trends of where we might be going overall in terms of families coming into the city and staying. So that should be out by the end of the week and we expect a pretty quick turnaround in terms of responses to that proposal. And as you know, school committee budgeted for that work to be done this year, so we're trying to prioritize it right at the top.

Ms. Skipper added that it is a good unpredictable and the science of it is certainly our immigrant newcomer population. We are approaching the time of year that we tend to see more families coming. For instance, we often have seen an immigrant population from El Salvador, Central America, we're seeing a much higher Brazilian population this year, and that started at the middle of last year. It's a little difficult, because when families and students are coming, they're not coming at a time of year where you can plan for it, you have to be able to open new classrooms, new classrooms require space and resources. So this is the reason we do our best project, we do our best to lay out flexibility of both space, and also dollars. That said, we will just never know until we're in the new year and we see what's happening. Our hope is that in working with the company, if we can get the rest of it down to more of a science, then we have the wiggle room when it comes to the new comer population.

Chair Normand asked Superintendent Skipper to speak to some of the situations that are specific to this year that are making it more complicated to find classroom space throughout the district.

Ms. Skipper shared that this obviously is a big transition year for the high school project where we are housing in this building, which would be swing space, our high school students from CTE. So currently, we have four to five hundred students that are coming through here during the day and going back and forth from shuttles to the high school. This would typically be classroom swing space that if we needed it we could use it. Additionally, we have a project in queue for moving in creating a couple of new classrooms for our ASD at the Winter Hill. But given the size of the project, we have to actually wait to the beginning of the summer to do it next year. When that happens, that will actually free up some space and Capuano to be able to open up additional kindergarten and additional pre-K classrooms.

What we do know is that on the west side of the city, right now, if you were to take the West, Brown and the Kennedy, they're all fairly maxed out with just general education, because none of them other than the Kennedy have some programming with special education. The Argenziano is in another part of the Union Square area, another part of the city that we're seeing a bit of a boom, that's been going on now for several years. And the Argenziano is one of the places that we have heavy sheltered English immersion programming. So we will be looking at all of this in terms of programming, making sure that, particularly with travel this year with the bridges, the West schools tend to sort of be a bit more isolated from the normal from accessing the center of the city, such as Capuano or the east side. So this is the first year that we're actually doing some transport for families who we could not find the space for in the west side. And therefore are in either the East Somerville or the Capuano. We are hoping that that is a very temporary situation, because having very small kids on buses is not something that we want to practice.

This will be an evolving area as we look at space and enrollment projections, but the good news is that we're seeing more and more students coming back to us. Students that previously have had private education or charter school, or those that have sort of moved out are actually staying in. So when we look at the pipeline for students, it's very full of students, which is great. I think that says a lot of faith in the teaching staff and the district staff.

- Bus/Traffic Update

Superintendent Skipper asked Dr. Curley to share the update on traffic and bussing.

Dr. Curley started off with Traffic, recognizing that it is currently a challenge in the city. We are working very closely with city with the mobility department, traffic and parking to try to make this as feasible an experience in a year as possible under those circumstances. As Mary mentioned, were running regular shuttles from Edgerly to the high school. We have after some testing last week, put a third class into rotation. So the update from Mr.

DeSimone today was that that the system is working very well. We're moving 430 students throughout the day on 20 minute increments. If you think about the high school has seven blocks, and they have four-minute transition times, we had to do some real work with the schedule to make sure there was minimal impact to student learning. But that system is now working well. And students as much as possible are spending their time in bulks at each school, so we're putting them on the bus as little as possible. We also have as reminder for this group and for people at home, eight school to school shuttles that run either from ELL department or Special Ed. So that's 3 that go from school to school taking students to programming that might not be in their proximity school. And one afternoon run and one late run to get students home from after school. So those buses take about 330 students a day. And we've had folks on cabinet on all of those buses each morning, and as we end the afternoon, to get a sense of the schedule and the timing. And we've done some tweaks of moving some of those runs up a little bit and contacting parents to make sure that we're not taking longer with the traffic situation. Those students eligible for that program are ELL students, some Special Education students, and as Superintendent Skipper mentioned, some K students who are outside of their proximity school and perhaps got their fourth or fifth choice, that's a very small number of students. Eastern Bus Company is our provider for those routes. And again, like the high school, we've got that system rolling pretty well this time of year, it's always a little harder at the beginning of the year, you still have students coming in and have to settle the roster over time, but those buses are now up and running in the routes are set.

Superintendent Skipper continued, in addition to that for special education, we have shuttles and vans that do a combination of door to door, they also shuttle from key locations and then we have our out of district. So there's a lot of moving parts in our homeless transportation, which are often our singleton's. So the transportation picture has gotten bigger and bigger and bigger by nature of the needs of the students. And so I think, very similarly, we want to take a deeper look at transportation as a whole, to say, is there a more efficient way to be able to do things? And also, you know, would it make sense to put it under a person, as opposed to having three or four different people who currently are the ones that are riding the shuttles to make sure that the buses are getting to where they need to get. I would like to thank the parents and the students have been incredibly patient, and staff just very flexible, incredibly patient recognizing the tension of the traffic and getting across the city at various points. But I think at this point now, for this full week, I think we're in a good place. You know, we've worked some things out and rewrote it.

Mr. Green added some remarks and a question. So first, I want to say I had the pleasure of observing the bus stops with Assistant Superintendent Mazza and Director of Finance, Fran Gorski, and I want to complement our students for being mature and graceful, our students are models of maturity, and it's great to be able to see that. That being said, I've heard requests from parents about the intersection of Broadway and McGrath, which has been atrocious, does it make sense to ask the city to add crossing guards there?

Superintendent Skipper responded, the answer is yes on the crossing guards, we can make that request. We are also very thankful to SPD for the police details that they've given, particularly at the high school, right along the school street route, because traffic was just continually backing up. We're still working on trying to get them on the McGrath and Broadway intersection, just in terms of a police detail for the traffic, because there's just a lot of bad

traffic behavior of pulling out and blocking the intersection. I get into the left hand lane to go straight, which seems very counterintuitive, because the other lanes are completely blocked and our buses don't have that luxury. So we're trying to work it out, that is actually state police jurisdiction, so this is a bit of a struggle, but I will say SPD, and Chief Fallon have been amazing with anything we've asked for. There's been a great deal of easement in the traffic and it's now flowing due to the details, it's still heavy volume, but at least it's flowing. But we will put the request in for more actual crossing guards.

President Ballantyne just wanted to say thank you to the administration in terms of the traffic. With all the bridges down everybody is experiencing the traffic, and in addition, we're building in high school. So I just have to say I've seen the effort and the school department has been really professional and calm about things. That spreads, so our students feel that and they react maturely to it. I really appreciate all the effort, thank you very much.

Ms. Skipper added that Dr. Curly, Assistant Superintendent Mazza and Ms. Davila were all riding the buses at different points, to be able to clock them and be able to figure out how we might offer different routing. Our special education transportation company, actually came in on Saturday with our staff and rerouted to be able to make it work better. Eastern Bus Company, which does the rest of our buses has been very responsive, even coming up with the other bus. So I think it's been a team effort, we want the kids to get safely from point A to point B so that they can learn.

- Filed Trip Compensation Memo

Superintendent Skipper announced the following item on the agenda, the Field Trip Compensation Memo, and if anyone had questions while Dr. Curly was still in attendance. She added that the question came out as to what is the support, and what is the procedure that we do relative to expectation of fundraising? I think Dr. Curly indicated from our policy the key points. The question then came out; do we compensate teachers for actually going on field trips? The answer is no, there is no stipend for going on the field trip. What there is, is if the field trip involves things like travel costs of lodging, meals, airplane, things like that, and often that will be built in, provided there's enough funding for that to be built in. But other than that, there's no pay for actually the time that's gone. And I think that was the specific question that Ms. Pitone had asked. So that's in the packet for your reference.

Chair Normand asked for any clarifying questions on that, there were none.

- Modification of School Improvement Plans Memo (Mr. Mazza)

In your package you have a memo from Kenya Avant, who is our data coordinator. The memo basically outlines many of the changes that we've undertaken with the school improvement planning process. We've moved from a year to year cycle to a two-year cycle. With Kenya's help, support and leadership, she's taken all principals through the school implementation cycle, which is found on page two. When plans are created, this process is followed every time; there's a data review, there's an investigation about root causes of why the data is what it is, developed strategies, and then you start to implement your school improvement plan. Then the budget collaboratives happen and so you aligned your resources to that and then we have the school committee presentations and the schools finalize the school improvement plan.

As you know, school improvement plans are basically what drives the school, this process is very important, it's collaborative and it's something that we take very seriously. So on page three, the proposal is to split into two cohorts, cohort one has five schools and cohort two has five schools. Cohort One for this year, would be the cohort who presents to the school committee, and the other five schools would send a memo outlining progress on the school improvement plans. I think this is important because it's a lot of time undertaking for 10 schools to go in any given year. I think while the process is good, I don't think there is enough time for principals and leadership teams and parents to come in and talk about the things that are happening in schools, and there's not enough time really for question and answers. So if we split into two cohorts, there's more time for presentations that could be more in depth. I think that these presentations should go to full committee, as opposed to just Ed Programs, I think full committee should hear these because they are that important. While the guidelines for the memo haven't been drafted yet, they'll be along the lines of looking at goals and giving us data points of where schools are and areas of improvement that you're still working on. So in speaking with all the principals, including myself, who was

one last year, everybody's very excited about this, it gives a little bit of relief for the presentation. In my thought process around the cohorts, the experience principals will be in Cohort One, our newer principals will be in Cohort Two, which will give them a little more time to get used to the process and to send a memo that I can present to school committee.

That is our hope and our goal for this year and as we move forward with our school improvement planning process. So if you look at the chart that you have, top section is this year, cohort one does a presentation, cohort two a memo, and then it flips the following year and then again the following year. I think this is a very comprehensive process that I think everyone will appreciate, and will have a deeper understanding of what happens really within the school walls.

Chair Normand wanted to add a little bit in historical context; when I started six years ago, school improvement plans were reported about the school, but they were essentially how the school would make budget asks. As we involved the budgeting process so that it would be a more comprehensive, more thorough, more locally generated process, we've been able to separate the budget request from the school improvement plans. School Improvement Plans, obviously informed about requests, but to me, that was such an important change on how we do improvement. I'm thrilled, because this is a much more comprehensive, this is more long-term, because you can't make school improvement plans a quick process. So I think going to your cycle, and separating it from the budget gap, I'm very excited about.

Mr. Sullivan also wanted to share her support. I am very supportive of this and think it makes a lot of sense to shift some of that time intensive planning into actually focusing on implementation and evaluating what's happening, a huge thing for schools to be able to do. I just had a couple of questions. First, whether in that mid cycle memo, I would assume the schools at that point could also tweak what their plan is? So it's sort of an updated adjustment, if you will.

Ms. Skipper responded absolutely.

Okay that makes sense, Ms. O'Sullivan continued. On the last page where it has the italicized text, "The cycle of schools in Cohort Two has shifted to three years instead of two", Is that right?

Mr. Mazza explained that basically what that means is there's an extra time allotment for Cohort Two schools. So basically, this year is year two of school improvement plans, so cohort two essentially would have another year.

Okay so they presented last year and they won't present this year but will present next year, so really they are in their mid-cycle now, so it's really still two years Ms. O'Sullivan corrected.

It is, Ms. Skipper agreed, I think because several of those schools have a change in leadership.

Oh, yeah, that makes sense. I think having that three years in there makes it sound even longer and I don't think it really is, Ms. O'Sullivan added.

It's not Ms. Skipper continued, it's just an extra year for them, they're just now getting that year. And I mean, I think that just fits in general, you know, we operate off of two-year goal cycles. I mean, even on school credit, we often have a three-year goal cycle. And I think for the schools to every single year, the gearing up was not allowing schools to fully be able to have the dialogue with school committee that they want to have.

I would say school committee experienced the same frustration from a different perspective, added Chair Normand, it was a huge amount of work, and it was rushed and that is not fair, our educators and our students deserve more than that.

So you know, what I appreciate and I know many of you said it as well, is that it's one thing to get up and talk about everything that's going well. It's another thing and it takes another level of transparency to get up and talk about what you're trying to improve, said Superintendent Skipper. That takes a courage and a transparency that we have worked on building and I think now schools are finally comfortable and now they need the time to be able to express it and have that dialogue.

Chair Normand asked if we have an idea of when we will know which schools are in which cohort?

Superintendent Skipper said she already has an idea of who she wants where based on the leadership and other factors. She will share at a later meeting.

VI. NEW BUSINESS ITEM C TAKEN OUT OF ORDER

C. Update on File: GBBA-R Gender Identity Support for Staff

Superintendent Skipper asked to release Dr. Curly, but before he goes, I just want to point out that we did update in the packet, the Gender Identity Support Memo and we put all the information in there, including the trainings that we've been working on with staff. So if there are any questions, I just want to have Dr. Carly take them before he leaves.

Mr. Green gave Dr. Curley a commendation. Thank you for the memo, I'm sure I will have follow up questions but I don't just yet. And actually, more broadly, I want to say this is probably the best packet of information I've gotten, the agenda having all the categories of the district information that we've asked for is what we like to see, just in general, very happy with this.

Chair Normand asked one question, I would like the good work that's being done to be shared more broadly. How is that being communicated, or is there a plan to put that out there? Because I think some of our kids are feeling very vulnerable and don't know that this is actually a discussion that's being had district wide.

Superintendent replied that many of these trainings have been communicated through the principals and policy changes through the principals who then in turn, because they're involved in their SST's, have really been through the student support teams. What I will say is that we're having some additional conversation, just as of last week, to talk about specifically for transgender students, what additional supports you may be able to give. Furthermore, we're having conversations with LGBTQ, about having some affinity group at the staff level, which was asked for through Julia Post, who is the staff facilitator. So this is a very common conversation for us about not just what the policy says, but also how do we go beyond the policy to actually respond to the needs that we're seeing.

Dr. Curley added that some of the advocacy from this started with the Gay Straight Alliance at the high school, so we're closing that loop. Also, Dr. Davis has been talking with them about the work that's going on at the district to address some issues in terms of what they've brought forward. That's currently an ongoing dialogue with Susana to share that out more broadly. But some of this did come from students, particularly at the high school.

VII. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT OUT OF ORDER

• Homework Policy Memo

Superintendent Skipper states that Assistant Superintendent Mazza is going to talk specifically about sort of the next steps, but she wanted to just frame where we are.

As you know, school committee had passed a policy, what then evolved after that is there had been some changes to what had come out of the Homer Task Force. And it was during that process, and then the subsequent approval, that we had staff come forward and really encourage us to have more dialogue about it, because they felt that, for instance, the absence of the high school years being silent, some things around the middle school grades in terms of like how to coordinate and plan given that they don't have common planning time. There really was just more concern that this should be a policy that brings together family and parents, with students and with staff, and instead of that it seemed as if the place that we were in back in the spring was not there, it was going in the

opposite direction. So we made the decision to hold the policy in abeyance, while we could meet with STA and be able to have a further conversation about what could be healthy next steps that would allow us to get to that point, have a healthy process that had both breath, so not just surveying but really being able to have dialogue with the teachers. And so I am happy to report that we've had those conversations, and have a plan that we believe will take us through this year, be able to get everybody on a better page together in consensus, and then be able to come up with a healthy implementation plan, which I think for this is key. It's not too often that we pass a policy that impacts broadly the way this particular one does, or for which there's a lot of different feelings and emotions around it. So being in a little bit of uncharted territory, I think what's most important and what makes this district really special is having our teachers and our staff really together on things. And so that needs to be something that we work toward. So with that, Assistant Superintendent Mazza is going to just talk a little bit about what the plan is for the first half of the year and then what that will lead to in the second half.

One of the major things that came out of last year were teacher focus groups and we wanted to make sure that we had a good representation from each school. As part of professional development teachers have 10 hours of professional development that they can choose what to participate in for. One of the hours could be devoted, if they choose, to the educator focus group on the homework policy at their school. We think it's very important because teachers in their schools talking about how homework impacts them, how the policy that was revised would impact them and then we move forward. We're meeting tomorrow to draft questions, which I will send to School Committee.

Chair Normand asked who is drafting the questions.

Mr. Mazza responded, himself and Karen Woods. He continued,

I will send the questions to School Committee and to SJ leadership so everybody has those questions beforehand. So the way it looks right now is there are three dates in October that will be held for focus groups. And the reason we did it this way is because there's a lot of PD offerings that are happening and trying to coordinate all of those, but still to get a deeper conversation at school with teachers, if we tried to rush this it would not happen. The schedule for these focus groups is as follows:

Tuesday, October 8- West Somerville Neighborhood School
Wednesday, October 23- John F. Kennedy School
Monday, October 28- Benjamin G. Brown School
Monday, November 18- Albert F. Argenziano School
Thursday, November 21- East Somerville Community School
Monday, December 9- Arthur D. Healey School
Thursday, December 12- Winter Hill Community Innovation School
Wednesday, January 8- Michael E. Capuano Early Childhood Center
Monday, January 13- Next Wave Full circle
Tuesday, January 14- Somerville High School

We put the two high schools at the end given all of the things that are happening with a new building and students moving around. At each focus group there will be two facilitators; an STA facilitator and a facilitator from SPS. Once we have all the data we're going to look at the data from a K to two sub group, a three to five subgroup, six to eight sub group, and then a nine to twelve. I think what we'll find is there are differences at each grade level in each subgroup, so we'll have that data to present. I will plan to present the data to you in the findings from all the focus groups at the first full meeting in February. Our hope is that from that we can revise the policy that we're talking about and have a ready for implementation, Fall of 2020. And the reason for the fall of 2020 is because it's very difficult to switch things mid-year with teachers because they plan in advance. If you switch a policy like this, it will have a tremendous impact on all classrooms throughout the district. This will allow time for Superintendent

Skipper to talk with principals about a rollout plan for all schools, that way everybody will be prepared come the Fall of 2020 to roll out this new policy.

Chair Normand opened the floor for questions and discussion.

Ms. O'Sullivan agreed with Superintendent about really trying to stick with a healthy process. There was a lot of good intention before and I'd like to acknowledge that. There was a lot of work done with the task force and with this committee on getting feedback, and a lot of parents that submitted surveys, we had classes, kids send several letters to us, so I want to acknowledge that there was a lot of work that was done before.

With that said, going forward, hearing about the focus groups was very helpful, I'm curious to know how the research will inform this, and whether that will be part of those focus groups, taking some time to read some of the research. I'm also curious about whether I think going up to the high school makes a lot of sense, I think the old policy was K-8 and so that's probably how we shifted or stayed with the with the K focus, but that makes sense. It would be really interesting to hear from some high school kids and having them reflect back into their middle school grades, and whether they felt they were prepared when they got to high school and in general gain student input. I think there was a survey before, but I think as part of this process if we're going to do this, let's get some feedback from students and parents as well to really make this a robust process.

Superintendent Skipper agreed these were all great points. Part of why this fit into PD was to be able to share with the educators everything that was collected, because I do think there was a lot of thoroughness in the process, in terms of what we got from the ad resource piece, as well as whatever surveying was done. I would like to see on the serving us to identify gaps of groups that maybe we didn't get the feedback that we were looking for in volume, particularly like our English Language Learner parents, there was definitely a discrepancy of not getting a large enough percentage. I'd like SFLC to go back and ensure that we're reaching out and getting as much information as possible and or holding open houses, being able to do some informal kind of conversations with them. Same thing with students, with the high school I think it's a good time to get some of that information, knowing that we're in the midst of the Barr work and thinking about a new educational program and what we should be considering in terms of the boundaries of some of that. You know, I know I hear from students how stressed they are at the high school level and I think helping parents to equate how many say AP, or honors classes students are taking with how many hours of work a day that is. And then is that feasible and reasonable that if a student is taking three or four honors and AP in a given year, what comes off plate for the student. In every conversation I've had with groups of kids, it's been around that, now some of that is that they don't have the time in their schedule to do the work. And that's one of the release that we're trying to give as part of the schedule revamp. But even that said, it helps parents understand that if you take an AP, you can expect an outline of homework. So you do the math, and you can kind of come up with what are you asking the student to do. So I think it's good that from the high school standpoint, we're not going to just kind of do K-8 and not at least begin to assemble the data. It may not be that we can come up with the exact recommendation for the high school through the process, because I mean, there's a lot to consider at the high school level, but I think at least we have a beginning for the high school.

Mr. Green had a few things to add. First, if we're going to be getting more feedback I'd like to hear from alumni. In part, because we hear a lot about the amount of homework we give, but I don't know if we can hear if that works in actually helping them be college ready. There's more to college readiness than just the amount of it. And as a point of information for context, when we passed the homework policy in February, we knew that we would have to come back and revisit the high school part, that it was complicated. It's worth pointing out that the task force was originally assembled in the fall of 2017 with Dr. McKay. So it frankly, frustrates me to hear from the STA that they feel teachers weren't included when priority in leadership was on the task force. I want to be clear that I believe that teachers may feel like they weren't listened to, but that feels like a failure. I think it's important to knowledge that was not the intent of this body when the task force was conceived, because we do think teacher opinion matters. I'm also glad Ms. O'Sullivan brought up the issue of

research. In conclusion there's a logistical problem I think we have to address, which is that in my review of the STA memo, I hear that they weren't included in the process and their not too keen with the content, which are both things I take very seriously, both things are worthy of looking at, but they are not actually grievable. So if we're going to continue to hold of policy in abeyance we have to vote on it. We can't just decide to hold a policy without the school committee's approval, we have to act on it.

Superintendent Skipper replied, so I think it was our counsel's advice, and we can certainly see that again, that through a request to bargain the reasonable solution was to allow more time through focus groups where dialogue could happen, as opposed to just survey, since that's where it seemed like the process really kind of fell apart. And so I think it was Counsel's advice that we take that approach, knowing that there is deep respect by this party for our staff, and knowing that it serves no one well to have an issue become divisive to separate parents and staff. So I think, procedurally, whatever we need to do to make that happen, if it takes an official vote from school committee to hold it, so be it.

Ms. Palmer agreed with Mr. Green; I take Mr. Green's comment pretty seriously in terms of the procedural piece of this, because if policies passed by School Committee can then be held in abeyance, definitely by administration, then what power does this body in fact hold ultimately? So I mean, I don't know if Mr. Green has a motion for the floor. But I think in terms of counsel's advice I agree that it makes sense, there's a duty to bargain, there was a demand to bargain, we're now entering a new form of that process to hopefully achieve what we all want to see. Which is, this policy moves forward in a way that's meaningful, that there's mutual understanding and a baseline of agreement, it will be implemented, and families and staff can agree. But I think it's absolutely critical to the school committee that we make that choice.

Chair Normand called on herself. When this came up, and we as a body voted to hold off and to give the task force a chance to reconvene, none of us took that time to say it put a time limit on it.

Mr. Green explained what previously happened, the union exercised their right in a request to bargain, we asked for a memo, which we've now received, thank you. And so now our actions are, given this memo, what do we do? And I am willing to postpone that discussion until next meeting. But I do think as a matter of procedure and good practice, we as a body have to decide how we are going to take that piece on.

Chair Normand continued, I would encourage us that conversations about strategy and bargaining will be on our next Executive Session, and I think that is the appropriate place to have that initial discussion.

Ms. Palmer added that the broader procedural concern is that we have unanimously passed policy, by the School Committee and when it was asked at that meeting, the timeline for implementation, we were told as soon as possible. I mean, there were a few things that needed to happen, but the policy was going to be implemented. And that has clearly changed, and I acknowledge and respect all the work that's gone into the next steps, and I agree with them. But we have a new policy passed unanimously by a body, and if we're going to hold it in abeyance until September 2020, then I think we should vote to do that. So that would be my motion on the floor.

MOTION: Motion by Ms. Palmer to vote on holding the Homework Policy passed in February 2019 in abeyance until the Fall of 2020. Seconded by Mr. Green.

MOTION: Motion by Mr. Green to table the discussion about Ms. Palmer's Motion until next meeting.

Chair Normand asked that administration get clarification from counsel of where we are in this bargaining process? And what legal parameters does that possibly put on this?

Superintendent Skipper responded that we can go back to the executive notes from June because council did update us on this.

Chair Normand added; my understanding from the last memo that we got from counsel Long was that we have the authority to pass the policy, but that if it impacts the day to day working conditions of the staff, that they can then demand to bargain and so my understanding, and I think we need clarification of where are we in that part of the negotiating process? And if we're in the negotiating process, I don't know that we can vote to put a date on it. I think these are all questions that we need legal counsel advice on.

Ms. Palmer's understanding is that we are not currently bargaining.

To which Superintendent Skipper replied, correct, I think what we successfully came to a conclusion and it was that we got the recommendation from counsel that we enter a process with our teachers to hold deeper focus groups that allowed for deeper input. And that is the plan that you are hearing this evening.

Ms. Normand said we will work out the logistics of how to have these conversations in order. But I think we would need to have legal counsel before we proceed, and to take a public vote on this.

She continued. My concern about homework is less about the specificity of the guidelines but what how do we actually prepare our kids to move from elementary to middle to high school? And are they prepared post-secondary for success? And I think that is got to be the driving question that informs all of our practice, all of our decisions. MY concern about the homework is that there's been a lot of focus on minutes and less on the larger questions, and I would like that to be a fundamental driving force, are kids ready? And are they prepared for post-secondary. I was also going to say the same thing as Mr. Green, I think we really need to reach out to our alumni because, having a kid at the high school and one in college now and I can tell you overwhelmingly, the thing that I keep hearing again and again, is that there are not extensive independent writing projects, starting in the middle grades. And so I think we need to look at what's the research how to actually prepare kids for college. I have some very strong feelings about AP and test prep. And not necessarily I understand the importance of having markers for college recruiters that can identify that the talent of our kids in ways that they can easily identify. But I would say to quote, a recent grad, I would have said the AP literature classes are almost a disservice because there's no writing component to it. And so I think we need to really look at all of the homework from very young, how do we how do we instill a love of learning a curiosity, and an age appropriate development of skills, which is not just about curriculum, it's also about time management, it's about research, it's about all of those other things. And I, I would like to broaden the discussion, as opposed to narrow it down to whether, you know, the number of minutes.

Chair Normand then called on Ms. Palmer.

Just a couple of quick comments to bring it back to a procedural for a minute, just to clarify. And just to say that, I mean, when we, when we pass this policy unanimously, I was thrilled, I mean, this was like a crowning moment of my years of service here, three and a half years. And so I was very excited to get the word out, and I am now completely on board for a revisit, and would really like to see it be something that everyone is comfortable with, so I want to make that clear. But in terms of the procedural, I think it'd be helpful if we could have a quick clarification for what the current guidance is both to teachers and to families, because there was a lot of confusion when the policy was passed, that it was suddenly, you know, the next day or very soon thereafter, and we now know that we're looking towards the September 2020 start. So in this period of having a policy in abeyance, we do have an existing policy. There was an issue with the policy on the website that people were trying to see the old one and the new one was there, and so that has now been clarified, which is great. The old policy is back but it's a 10-year-old policy, and a sort of not work current thinking from leadership. So can you comment on that?

Superintendent Skipper responded. So we replaced the new policy with the old policy, in order to make sure that that's the only thing people were referencing. Our intent was to send a memo of to the field, to reiterate that, that right now, people should be following the old policy. But based on this conversation right now, I'm not sure that that is, what our next step should be. Because what I'm hearing is that until there's an official school committee vote, unless I heard that wrong.

Chair Normand replied. My clear understanding is that it's still in abeyance and I think what we don't need to do is to take any steps without being very clear. But from a legal standpoint, and negotiating standpoint, and frankly, from our own policy. When it was announced that night, after that vote that went against our own policy of how we announced policy changes. It says very clearly in our own policies that we're supposed to inform all informed bodies, and that didn't happen. So I think there's a lot of murky areas and I would urge us all to be very diligent on every detail, whether it's school committee policy, and how policies development and announced, legally negotiating on the field and that we don't take any steps that would further confuse this.

Chair Normand called on Mr. Green.

To be clear, I think, yes, we are in abeyance, pending a school committee decision one way or the other. So I think we need to have a vote to formalize whatever we do. But until we have that vote, I think the status quo is the status quo, which is that the policy is in abeyance.

Chair Normand then called on Ms. Palmer.

My understanding as a chair of rules is that this body sets policy and Administration implements it. In terms of implementation, we've been told that it's not currently being implemented, and there is a proposed new plan to move forward to eventual implementation of a new homework policy, amended as passed. So and I think the concern that I have was more of a presidential one, right? If the School Committee creates policies that are then held in abeyance, by administration without authority from the body, then what are we doing? So to the Chair's comment, about speaking specifically about the action that I took after the meeting, which was to post it to Facebook, I do think that this body needs to figure out greater levels of transparency. And, I probably should have put a disclaimer at the top that said, you know, implementation TBD, though, when asked in the meeting, we did get an answer that night from the Superintendent. We passed the policy unanimously in a public meeting that was televised.

Chair Normand clarified that our policy actually states that when the School Committee passes a new policy, the affected parties need to be informed before it goes into effect. I took it to me that people who are going to be affected, teachers and everyone should have the time to know this and have it beforehand. I think your overall policy, your point is, is that what some of our policies, I think, don't take into account, social media, other updated pathways of communication, and that we need to look at that. But I do think that if we were to go through this process again, that a number of us would do things differently.

She then called on Mr. Green.

I think a fair and valid criticism is that it is not clear and it's not systemic, how policy changes and policy approvals get disseminated. So I'd like to see us explore a formal way of tracking that, so everyone knows that when the school committee asked, this will be the following steps.

Chair Normand then called on President Ballantyne.

Thank you. In the legislature, in the city council, when we enroll or ordain in ordinance, that's a local municipal law, the typical process is, that it's 48 hours before it's actually enacted, and less at the time that we enroll in and ordain or take the votes on enrolling ordain, say that we wanted to enact it that night. You know, so then the 48 hours is taken away. So I was thinking, is there something similar that you can do on the school committee side that you vote within school committee, for a policy, and in two weeks or four weeks automatically, whatever time it needs for them to be shared within the public school system?

Chair Normand agreed, and said she's got two items that she has for Rules to take on.

Ms. Palmer said she is happy to take up effective date as part of our policy in Rules Management.

Chair Normand, does anyone want to make any more comments, because I want to just summarize so that we all have a shared understanding of what the next steps are going to be.

One, is to get legal counsel on where we are in the process and how does that intersect with impact bargaining with our union? And Whether, procedurally, do we need to take a formal vote to continue to keep the policy in abeyance?

Anything else on homework.

Okay, thank you very much. That concludes the superintendent's report.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

D. Field Trips (Recommended action: approval)
October 4, 2019 (Rain date: October 7,2019)

Students from Next Wave/ Full Circle will visit Mount Monadnock in New Hampshire. Student cost is \$5. Travel by school van.

October 11, 2019 and October 12, 2019

SHS students will visit Manhattan High School in the Bronx, NY for a Varsity Cross Country Meet. Travel by school van, no student cost.

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

E. FY19 SCALE/ADP Diploma Request (Recommended action: approval)

Sophia Rose O'Connell Somerville, MA

MOTION: Motion by Mr. Green to approve this ADP Diploma, seconded by Ms. Palmer.
Motion approved via voice vote.

F. 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	Julie Engel	Somerville, MA	\$5,000	SFLC Playgroups
120 Backpacks	Kiwanis	Somerville, MA	TBD	SPS

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

VII. ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS

Ms. Normand

Asked Ms. Palmer as Rules Chair, to look at the SC policy about policy development. Also, at the last School Committee meeting Ms. Pitone raised the question of developing a cellphone policy.

Also, this Friday at the WSNS is the PTA welcome to the school year coffee from 8:15 to 9:00 a.m.

Mr. Green

Is requesting from the administration a sense of what it would take for us to have childcare at all SPS parent events.

Also, he will be running office hours with Representative Barbara this Thursday from 6:15 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at Tipping Cow Ice Cream

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:27 p.m.

Related Documents

Agenda

Field Trip Compensation Memo

Modification of School Improvement Plans Memo

Homework Policy Memo

Election Process for Anticipated School Committee Vacancy

Documents to support the update on File: GBBA-R Gender Identity Support for Staff

Submitted by: Katherine Santiago

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE
CENTRAL OFFICE MAIN CONFERENCE ROOM
REGULAR MEETING – SEPTEMBER 9, 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. REPORT OF STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

IV. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT

A. District Report

- 2019-2020 Student Enrollment Update
- Bus/Traffic Update
- Field Trip Compensation Memo
- Modification of School Improvement Plans Memo
- Homework Policy Memo

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Election Process for Anticipated School Committee Vacancy

B. Ward 2 Vacancy Nominations and Vote

C. Update on File: GBBA-R Gender Identity Support for Staff

D. Field Trips (Recommended action: approval)

October 4, 2019 (Rain date: October 7, 2019)

Students from Next Wave/ Full Circle will visit Mount Monadnock in New Hampshire. Student cost is \$5. Travel by school van. SHS students will visit Manhattan High School in the Bronx, NY for a Varsity Cross Country Meet. Travel by school van, no student cost.

October 11, 2019 and October 12, 2019

E. FY19 SCALE/ADP Diploma Request (Recommended action: approval)

Sophia Rose O'Connell Somerville, MA

F. 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	Julie Engel	Somerville, MA	\$5,000	SFLC Playgroups
120 Backpacks	Kiwanis	Somerville, MA	TBD	SPS

VI. ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS

VII. CONDOLENCES

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

To: Somerville School Committee

From: Jeff J. Curley, Ed.L.D.

Date: August 23, 2019

Re: Field Trip reimbursement

A question was raised at the end of last school year as to whether Somerville Public Schools pays for teachers to attend approved field trips. The School Committee and district recognize that firsthand learning experiences provided by field trips are an effective and worthwhile means of learning. Per approved policy IJOA:

1. The amount of time to be devoted to fundraising should be reasonable and commensurate with students' obligations for homework, after-school activities, and jobs.
2. Group fundraising activities are preferred. Students should not be assigned individual fundraising targets.
3. If students are charged individual fees for participation, the district should make every effort to provide scholarships where needed.

It is not the policy of the School Committee or district to further compensate teachers for their participation in approved field trips. Educator compensation is determined as part of the collective bargaining agreement of each particular unit. Where budget is available and requests have been made, the district has provided support for teacher travel, lodging, and meals.

September 3, 2019

TO: Chad Mazza, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction

FROM: Kenya Avant, Data Coordinator

RE: Modifications to the SIP Planning Process for the 2019-2020 School Year

CC: Mary Skipper, Superintendent; SPS School Committee

School improvement planning is important for the success of any school. In SPS, every school improvement cycle begins with a deep understanding of a school's current academic, social, and cultural environment. The cycle continues with the identification of goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound. Finally, school leaders monitor progress towards these goals and make changes as necessary. Administrative staff provide direct assistance to school leaders throughout the improvement cycle as well as in the ongoing monitoring of School Improvement Plans (SIPs).

Since 2012, many positive changes have been made to the school improvement planning process in Somerville so that it is more engaging, efficient, and effective. These changes include a two-year planning cycle instead of a one-year cycle and deeper involvement of School Councils. This year, I am proposing two-year presentation cycle for School Improvement Presentations to School Committee. This will mean that only half of the district's schools will present to School Committee in any given year. The other schools will update the School Committee through a School Improvement Memo.

The attached document outlines the current SIP process and includes a proposed schedule of the 2019- 2020 school year. Also attached, for reference, is a copy of the 2019 School Improvement Guide.

Any questions about the content of this memo may be directed to Kenya Avant, Data Coordinator at kavant@k12.somerville.ma.us.

Kenya Avant

2-Year School Improvement Planning Cycle

Goals of School Improvement Planning

1. Strengthen the practice of using data to inform school goal-setting; 2. Allow schools to identify and focus on a few overarching goals, which will allow them to be more effective and targeted in their approach towards school improvement; 3. Establish a process by which schools are able to easily monitor their progress, make mid-course corrections, and evaluate the effectiveness of their school strategies; 4. Allow for the coordination of resources and strategies between district and school staff; 5. Serve as a platform for substantive discussions between school and district personnel about key school challenges, opportunities, and strategies to improve student achievement.

School Improvement Cycle The SIP process comprises four distinct, iterative phases. All schools, regardless of which Cohort they are assigned to, go through the following steps during each School Improvement Cycle:

- Data Review
- Investigate Root Causes
- Develop Strategies
- Implement SIP Plan
- Align Resources (Budget Collaboratives)
- School Committee Presentation (or Memo)
- Finalize School Improvement Plan

Proposed SIP Schedule for the 2019-2020 School Year

It is proposed that beginning with the 2019-2020 school year, schools move to alternating school improvement cycles, with one presentation to School Committee per improvement cycle. Schools will be designated to either Cohort I or Cohort II. Because Cohorts I and II are currently on the *same* SIP cycle, the proposed change would *extend the SIP cycle of schools in Cohort II to three years instead of two years*. This would allow schools that have not yet met their improvement goals an extra year to focus on meeting their SIP goals. The proposed cohort schedule is as follows:

	Cohort 1 (5 schools)	Cohort 2 (5 schools)
	Data Review	Data Review
	Continued Implementation	Root Cause Investigation
		Develop SIP Strategies & Implement
	Budget Collaboratives	Budget Collaboratives
	School Committee Presentation	Memo to School Committee
	Final SIP Submitted	Final SIP Submitted
	Data Review	Data Review
	Root Cause Investigation	Continued Implementation
	Develop SIP Strategies & Implement	
	Budget Collaboratives	Budget Collaboratives
	Memo to School Committee	School Committee Presentation
	Final SIP Submitted	Final SIP Submitted

SY2021-22 (Cohort I in Y2 of cycle; Cohort II in Y1 of cycle)	Data Review	Data Review
	Continued Implementation	Root Cause Investigation
		Develop SIP Strategies & Implement
	Budget Collaboratives	Budget Collaboratives
	School Committee <i>Presentation</i>	<i>Memo to School Committee</i>
	Final SIP Submitted	Final SIP Submitted

Dear Somerville School Committee,

In February 2019 the Somerville School Committee released a homework policy that was a significant departure from the previous homework policy. As a result, the Somerville Teachers Association filed a demand to bargain due to the changes in working conditions, which is outlined below. In looking more deeply at the adoption of the homework policy we noted a significant departure from both the spirit of and the specific recommendations of the homework task force. Outlined below you will find a summary of our concerns around the process through which this decision was made and the content of the proposal itself.

Process

- **Roll Out.** The policy was announced on Facebook by school committee members prior to the majority of Somerville educators being aware of its existence. School committee members were answering parent questions and communicating about the policy online. All this occurred before teachers had the opportunity to fully read the policy much less the time to ask questions of our own, clarify expectations or adjust practice to adhere to a policy passed in the middle of the school year. This approach both privileged a small subset of English-speaking parents with access to these social media posts but blindsided the educators and ignored many members of Somerville's diverse community.
- **Timing.** Teachers had been planning diligently for months on how to cover all of the standards and content required. This includes planning homework assignments to meet the needs of a diverse student body. To implement a major policy initiative in the middle of the year with no advance notice disrupts and disrespects what we had already planned.
- **Teacher input.** As far as we are aware, no teachers were asked for input on creating a homework policy to best meet the needs of our students. The School Committee consistently commends our teachers as hardworking talented professionals. To be excluded from this process is disrespectful and not in the best interests of students.
- **Community input.** A policy this far reaching merits a comprehensive process to hear from all our students and families, particularly those who have historically been marginalized. Did all members of our community have opportunities to give meaningful input into the creation of the policy? Did the School Committee hear from a representative sample of our population? If not then the policy likely does not reflect the needs of our community.

Content of the Policy

- **Students will not be prepared for high school.** Our job is to prepare our students for high school and beyond. This new homework policy explicitly recognizes the importance of time management skills and the vital role that homework plays in developing these academic skills. We are concerned that the limits you set forth will inhibit our ability to prepare our students for high school. Furthermore, there is a clear lack of alignment between the high school policy and the upper elementary policy. We are concerned that this gap will make the transition to high school, already a challenging transition, that much harder.
- **Students will not be prepared for life.** Extrinsicly, homework cultivates necessary life skills, including self-discipline, time management, and work ethic. Such skills are vital in child and adolescent development because they are needed in all facets of adult life. Supporting the whole child requires that we build these skills in our students, and homework is one means of doing so.
- **Narrowing of the curriculum.** The Massachusetts Learnings Standards are extensive and we are always striving to cover all of the standards. We are concerned that this policy will negatively impact our ability to cover all of the standards and ensure student understanding. Homework plays a vital role in that process and if teachers are going to lose that time spent on task at home it will need to be made up during the school day. Teachers will be forced to make a choice between deeply covering most of the standards or rushing the learning to ensure they cover all of the standards during class time.
- **Disproportionate impact on high needs students.** This policy as written will disproportionately negatively impact our highest needs students. Many of our students do not have access to after school activities and greatly benefit from the structure that homework provides. In addition, we have a shared goal to close achievement gaps. Thoughtfully assigned homework is an important tool for teachers to support students in additional practice and skill building, thereby closing achievement gaps. To set an arbitrary time limit on homework ignores teachers' professionalism in this matter.
- **Inflexible.** Embedded in this policy are many assumptions about students and their families. Many of us have heard from parents in our community that homework plays a vital role for them to monitor their

children's learning and progress. As a school system serving a diverse community we must have flexibility in our policies. As educators we understand that a one size fits all approach doesn't work in a single classroom let alone across a system as complex as Somerville. Our strength is in our diversity and with that comes families of varied cultural backgrounds with different expectations around homework. Our policies need to give teachers flexibility to meet those diverse needs and expectations.

- **Insufficient time given for reading daily.** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children spend 20 min a day reading with family. The new policy does not allow for this to be accomplished on a daily basis in addition to the other assignments given. Daily reading helps students build their vocabulary, build fluency and in many cases helps to close the achievement gap. Simply encouraging reading is not enough.

- **Negative impacts on the home to school connection.** Many parents have expressed that they use homework as a way to understand what their child is learning in class on a daily basis. Educators are not assigning homework with the intention of passing the responsibility for teaching the material to parents/guardians as implied in the policy. However, homework does provide families with important insight into the progress their children are making in school. Teachers thoughtfully design homework to be an independent practice time and if students are not understanding the assignment it should be an opportunity for the parent to discuss with the teacher what is going on. Educators and families need to collaboratively monitor student work completion to ensure they are reaching their goals.

You have created a policy which impacts every educator, every student, and every family in the district without widespread input from any of these groups. To create a policy that promotes equity in our district requires that we slow down our processes to ensure that we are hearing from the voices in our community that we don't traditionally hear from. The Somerville Teachers Association is committed to engaging in a comprehensive and thoughtful process in thinking about the role homework plays in school and in our students' lives. It is essential that any homework policy take into account the diverse needs of our community, the expertise of our educators, and consider homework in the context of our greater educational goals. If we truly want to create a school system of equal opportunity and access, as the school committee goals state, we must look deeply at all of our programs and policies. Homework is one piece of a much larger puzzle that requires all of us working together to solve.

Respectfully,
Rami Bridge Somerville Teachers Association President

Process for addressing an anticipated vacancy on the School Committee that will occur approximately four months before the end of the vacating member's term.

As to the vacancy, the Charter states in pertinent part, that "if the vacancy in the office of school committeeman shall occur less than one year prior to any regular municipal election, it shall be filled for the remainder of the term by ballot of the remaining members of the school committee, the member so elected to be a qualified voter of the ward in the representation of which on said committee the vacancy exists." Somerville City Charter, Section 30.

The School Committee Rules set forth that Robert's Rules of Order "will govern the proceedings of the School Committee, except when those rules are in conflict with the committee's approved policies and regulations. . . " School Committee, BEDD. Robert's Rules or Order set forth several methods of making nominations:

1. the most familiar method - from the floor (open nominations); nominations do not have to be seconded; nominations close after all nominations received; or
2. by the chair; or
3. by a Committee; or
4. by ballot; or
5. by mail; or
6. by petition.

See Robert's Rules for Making Nominations -- Chapter XIV, Rule 46, pp. 416-424.

Nominations are followed by the election. A majority vote for one nominee is required to elect. See Robert's Rules for Elections, Chapter XIV, Rule 46, Page 426 - 427.

As for the method of voting, the School Committee rules state:

5. Method of Voting - Action shall, unless otherwise ordered, be by voice vote, . . . See School Committee, BEDF.

However, the Charter's use of the word 'ballot' indicates that members must cast a written vote. Robert's Rules states an assembly "cannot make a valid voice-vote election when the [Charter] requires elections to be by ballot;..." Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, 10th Ed., s. 10.. p. 119.

While ballot voting is generally secret, the Charter's ballot requirement must be read harmoniously with the disclosure requirements of the Open Meeting Law. In my opinion, individual members are required to cast their written ballots without disclosing their vote to each other at the time of casting their individual votes, but immediately after all the ballots are cast and collected the Chair must read aloud the ballot, including the name of the School Committee member/voter and his or her vote, i.e. "Member Doe casts her ballot for Jane Roe."

As to the uncontested candidate, in the November city election, for the seat being vacated, the Charter does not award the seat to an uncontested candidate. Any member may nominate any qualified voter of the ward to fill the unexpired term. To the extent a School Committee member wishes to nominate the one uncontested candidate, that person may be nominated. While the likelihood is remote, an uncontested candidate does not automatically assume a seat as that candidate could lose a seat to a write-in candidate at the election.