

Resolution in Support of People with Disabilities in Somerville Public Schools

WHEREAS Somerville Public Schools is committed to providing an inclusive, equitable, and safe environment for all students, staff, and caregivers/families, regardless of disability status, immigration status, national origin, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, socioeconomic status, or beliefs;

WHEREAS people with disabilities may hold a variety of other identities intersecting among other groups, which can compound experiences of marginalization;

WHEREAS Somerville is enriched by the presence of individuals with disabilities, and that the success and wellbeing of each member of our community is central to the wellbeing of the community overall;

WHEREAS the lawsuit *Texas v. Becerra* brought by 17 states, seeks to have Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ruled unconstitutional, which would jeopardize the rights of all people with disabilities;

WHEREAS President Trump's Executive Order 14212 "Establishing The President's Make America Healthy Again Commission" frames an increase in autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder diagnoses as part of "a dire threat to the American people and our way of life," without acknowledging the improved understanding of autism and ADHD that have arisen because of the tireless advocacy of the neurodiverse community, or the significant changes to the diagnostic criteria for ASD and ADHD that have resulted in many more people receiving these diagnoses than would have previously;

WHEREAS the nominee for Secretary of Education, Linda McMahon, has promised to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education, which plays a crucial role in monitoring states' compliance with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and ensuring that students with disabilities receive the services and supports they need; and

WHEREAS a January 16, 2025 report on Massachusetts's educational system from the ED Office of Special Education Programs identified ten findings of noncompliance with federal IDEA requirements, including in areas of Dispute Resolution and "Child Find" (identifying children with disabilities), which may put the state's annual \$340 million in federal special education funding at risk;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Somerville School Committee:

1. Recommits to providing inclusive educational opportunities for all students with disabilities and ensuring access to supports and services needed for students to thrive in the educational setting;
2. Will continue to engage with advocates and educators with expertise in areas of disability and its intersection with diversity, equity, and inclusion about how to integrate a disability justice framework throughout SPS curricula, including coverage of the history of the disability rights movement, for all students to further combat stereotypes and foster empathy;
3. Will foster collaboration and partnership between SPS and organizations such as Somerville SEPAC and the DESE Special Ed Department, as well as other institutions with expertise in special education, to promote best practices to identify and empower

students with disabilities to access grade-level instruction and promote compliance with federal and state requirements. Somerville will lead by example in identifying and meeting the needs of students with disabilities, consistent with SPS's commitment to inclusivity and excellence;

4. Wholeheartedly rejects any implication from the so-called "Make America Healthy Again" Executive Order that conditions such as Autism and ADHD represent a "threat to the American people and our way of life";
5. Authorizes the Chair of the Somerville School Committee, alongside the Superintendent and Director of Special Education, meet with the Committee's legal Counsel to develop strategies to assist national efforts in defense of federal Special Education Law and the enforcement thereof; and
6. Calls on the Massachusetts Legislature and Governor to codify special education rights into state law and to compensate districts for any potential lost federal funding.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that copies of this resolution shall be:

1. Distributed to all District schools and published on the district website;
2. Sent to state and federal representatives; and
3. Shared with the Somerville SEPAC.

Voted: Unanimously

Date: March 10, 2025

By: The Somerville School Committee