



Somerville Public Schools' Strategic Plan 2024



Welcome Letter from Superintendent



Dear SPS Community,

I am honored to share with you the Somerville Public Schools' Strategic Plan, which will serve as our roadmap for the next three to five years. This plan builds on Somerville Public School's longstanding belief that every child has the potential to achieve academic excellence and experience the joy of learning in a safe and welcoming environment.

This plan was developed collaboratively through the hard work and collective dedication of students, staff, families and community partners alike. It is based on feedback that was gathered from over 2600 survey responses, 42 focus group discussions, several root cause analysis sessions and numerous strategy meetings throughout the 2023-2024 academic year.

Our engagement efforts were expansive. We heard feedback from all 11 schools and across all SPS departments. Surveys were thoughtfully crafted to accommodate six different languages and 33 percent of family respondents were multilingual families. We heard from student voices ranging from the fourth through twelfth grades and gathered student survey respondents that were racially and ethnically representative of our student population.

In short, I am proud of how actively we've engaged the community to develop this plan and I'm incredibly grateful to each and every person who participated in the process. Your perspective, insight and expertise are invaluable and ensure that the goals and action steps outlined within this plan truly reflect our shared vision for the future success of Somerville Public Schools.

With gratitude,
Dr. Rubén Carmona
Superintendent of Somerville Public Schools



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VISION

We envision a student-centered learning community where every student – honoring their unique strengths and background – is empowered to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally through tailored supports and equitable access to opportunity.

MISSION

Our primary mission is to cultivate inspired learners who are equipped to make a positive impact on the world. We achieve this by fostering rigorous and joyful learning environments where students, families, staff and community partners collaborate with a shared commitment to academic excellence and well-being.



Entry Plan Summary of Findings

The following themes emerged as we engaged with thousands of stakeholders across the district and community.



Areas of Strength

- Students expressed a joy in learning and families celebrated the expertise and quality of educators.
- Students and families expressed an appreciation for the focus on social emotional learning and the overall well-being of students. They also expressed a desire for continued investment.
- Students and families expressed an appreciation for out-of-school time (“OST”) programming such as clubs, athletics, and child care. They also expressed an appreciation for the SPS Career and Technical Education program (“CTE”).
- Staff expressed an appreciation for the structure and offerings of professional development, coaching, and leadership opportunities.
- Staff expressed an appreciation for robust interpretation and translation services to aid in communication with families and families shared that their schools find ways to engage with them in their child’s education.
- Across the board there was an appreciation for the SPS culture of community, expressed through an appreciation for the diverse student population, the neighborhood feel, and meaningful relationships formed.

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Areas for Growth

- Staff identified a need to review and strengthen the use of evidence-based curricula, effective instructional practices, and multi-tiered systems of supports (“MTSS”).
- Students and families expressed a desire for a more diverse and representative staff.
- Students and families expressed a desire for more OST programming and youth spaces, especially for the middle grades. Staff expressed concerns around access to CTE for multilingual students due to language barriers.
- Staff expressed a desire to increase engagement and amplify the voice of multilingual, diverse, and/or underrepresented families. Some families shared a feeling of invisibility in their school community. And families expressed a need for improved communication at the school and district level.
- While many expressed an appreciation for up-to-date facilities, students, staff and families from the Winter Hill and Brown school communities expressed a need for updated facilities and a sense of urgency for improvements.



Values

We believe in:

- ★ Empowering every child to realize their potential to become leaders and achieve **academic excellence** through academic rigor, a commitment to consistent, high standards, and access to caring and attentive adults.
- ★ Embedding **equity and access** into every aspect of our school culture and community by maintaining a multicultural, multilingual, and inclusive school community, and disrupting and eliminating roadblocks to quality outcomes through strategic systems and practice.
- ★ Prioritizing the **whole child**, recognizing that their social, emotional, mental, developmental and physical health are foundational pillars for academic success.
- ★ **Using data to drive decision-making** to inform strategic initiatives, measure progress, and continuously improve student outcomes.
- ★ Cultivating robust partnerships and **engagement with families** and community stakeholders, prioritizing the essential need for collaboration, family partnership, and shared accountability.
- ★ **Sharing responsibility** across staff, students, families and community members to promote a culture of collaboration, transparency, and mutual respect.

“Prioritizing the whole child, recognizing that their social, emotional, mental, developmental and physical health are foundational pillars for academic success.”





Strategic Priorities

The strategic priorities outlined below reflect input from thousands of stakeholders and in-depth strategy sessions with students, staff, families and district leaders.

Priority #1 – Academic Excellence

Establish a shared instructional framework of academic achievement. Encourage a strengths-based mindset, promote equitable outcomes, and enable targeted supports based on need by focusing on quality curriculum, instructional rigor, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)¹ and engaging learning opportunities, with an emphasis on strengthening supports for multilingual learners and special education students.

We will achieve this by implementing the goals and action items below.

Goals and Action Items:

1. Implement high-quality, evidenced-based, and culturally responsive PK-12 curriculum by the end of academic year 2025-2026:
 - a. Continually assess and evaluate curriculum using the SPS Curriculum Review Cycle² to ensure it is high-quality, evidence-based, and culturally responsive.
2. Promote instructional rigor through educator development and by cultivating a culture of educators as leaders:
 - a. Align district-wide curriculum roll out and instructional practices utilizing the Ready for Rigor Framework by Zaretta Hammond³ to ensure a universal understanding of the baseline conditions required for every student to succeed

¹MTSS is a framework designed to meet the needs of all students by ensuring that schools optimize data driven decision making, progress monitoring, and evidence-based supports and strategies with increasing intensity to sustain student growth. As the name states, MTSS is a tiered system of support. Tier 1 support is universal (supports that help all students). Tier 2 is targeted support. Tier 3 is intensive support.

²The SPS Curriculum Development and Review Cycle is a multi-year cycle intended to provide structure for an ongoing, understood process where curriculum is reviewed and updated on a consistent basis. The cycle consists of the following steps: study, develop, prepare, implement, monitor, and reflect. The cycle also includes family & community engagement and is informed by tenets of equity.

³The Ready for Rigor Framework, contains four practice areas of Culturally Responsive Teaching. The four practice areas include: awareness, learning partnerships, information processing, community of learners and learning environment. These practices create the conditions that allow students to engage and take ownership of their own learning process. This framework was the focus of Zaretta Hammond's book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain* (2015).

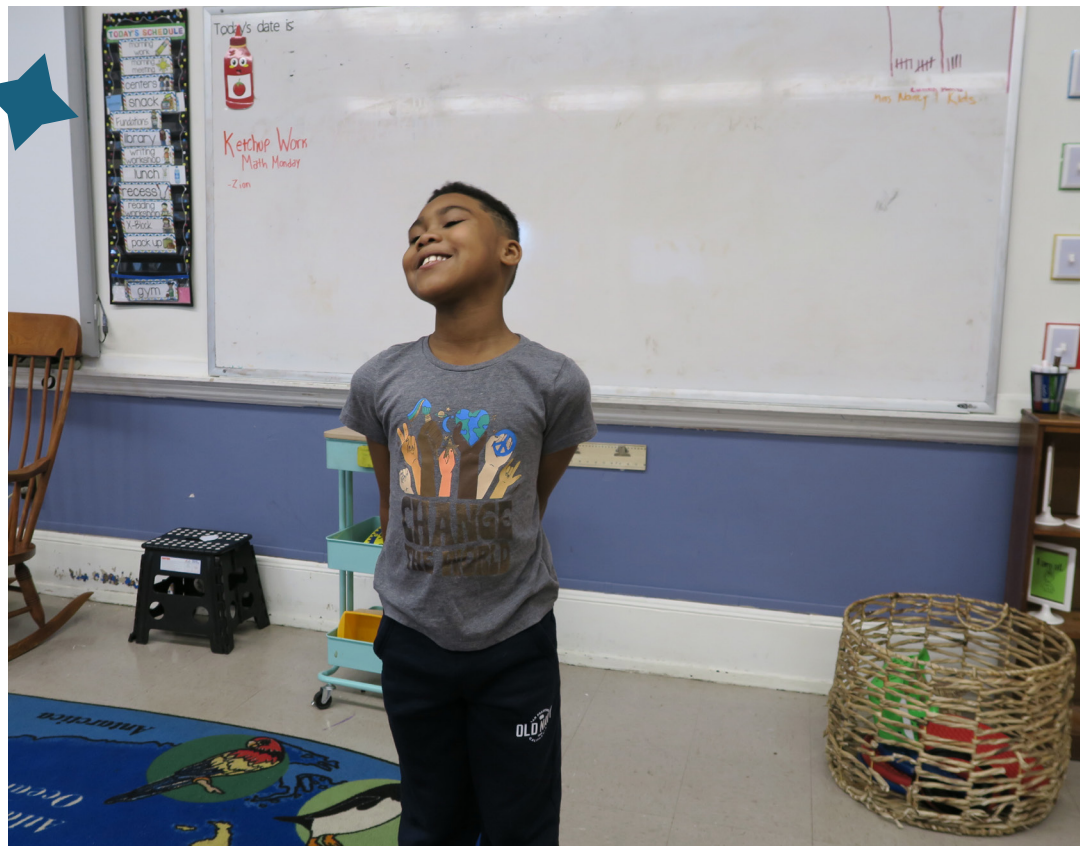
- b. Collaborate with educators on curriculum decision-making through the District Instructional Leadership Team and educator-lead committees.
 - c. Enhance professional development opportunities by maximizing educator collaborative time, learning communities and data analysis, through practices such as Common Planning Time.
 - d. Implement a system for acknowledging and showcasing educators and initiatives that demonstrate exceptional leadership in academic excellence.
3. Identify and implement best practices for targeted supports to meet the academic and social emotional needs of students:
 - a. Conduct a district-wide assessment of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), accommodation plans and targeted interventions to better meet student academic and social-emotional readiness and ensure equitable application of best practices district-wide.

“Implement a system for acknowledging and showcasing educators and initiatives that demonstrate exceptional leadership in academic excellence.”



“Define and advance the knowledge and skills every SPS student and graduate needs to thrive.”

4. Create a “portrait” of an SPS learner⁴
 - a. Define and advance the knowledge and skills every SPS student and graduate needs to thrive.
 - b. Incorporate student voice into decision-making processes by expanding initiatives such as the Student Equity Action Teams (“SEAT”)⁵.
 - c. Prioritize elementary, middle and high school transitions to ensure continuity in academic and social-emotional development.
 - d. Establish a multidisciplinary workgroup to explore the unique needs of students in middle grades.
 - e. Enrich learning experiences inside and outside of the classroom, focusing on emerging industries, innovation, climate, artificial intelligence, college and career readiness, art, civic engagement and more.



⁴ A Portrait of a Learner defines the key attributes, skills, and mindsets schools and districts aim to develop in students to achieve holistic growth. Attributes may include critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, communication, adaptability, global citizenship, ethical leadership and more.

⁵ SEAT is the youth arm of the School Improvement Team that incorporates student voice into decision-making processes. SEAT is a collaborative effort between SPS’ Department of Equity & Excellence and the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Priority #2 – Equity & Access

Equity and access is a foundational value of SPS and is embedded within all priorities in this strategic plan. The goals and action items below do not fully capture all of the ways in which we strive for equity and access. For example, all of the goals and action items in our Academic Excellence section further our mission toward equity and access.

We will expand equitable access to programming, supports and structures in order to bridge opportunity gaps and foster belonging. We will achieve the following by implementing the goals and action items below.

Goals and Action Items:

1. Develop a comprehensive system to disrupt persistent disparities across various student populations, with a particular focus on combating racial and ethnic inequities.
 - a. Review and set district-wide equity goals, relying on data such as graduation rates, disciplinary data, college and career readiness, alternative pathways and programs, MTSS referral patterns and more. Regularly convene district and school leaders to measure progress.
 - b. Deploy district resources based on student need, such as the distribution of academic interventionists, counselors and coaches.





“Continue staff learning opportunities on cultural competence, equity, inclusion, and belonging.”

2. Strengthen workforce diversity initiatives to ensure that staff are culturally competent, reflect the diversity of our students, and encourage belonging:
 - a. Revisit recruitment, hiring, retention, and development strategies and establish benchmarks at the school and district level.
 - b. Leverage and expand community partnerships that prioritize representation and foster a sense of belonging.
 - c. Continue staff learning opportunities on cultural competence, equity, inclusion, and belonging.
3. Expand access to and increase enrollment in out-of-school time programming
 - a. Strengthen communication channels – such as website updates, social media outreach, and direct communications – to provide clear information and guidance on enrollment procedures and benefits of participation, with a focus on reaching students and families with less access to information.
 - b. Collaborate with community partners and seek grant funding to develop and offer additional programming that aligns with academic goals and priorities.
 - c. Prioritize programs and partnerships that demonstrate academic excellence, cultural competence and student-centered practice aimed at meeting the needs of diverse learners.



4. Expand access to and increase enrollment and enrichment in Career and Technical Education and the Somerville Center For Adult Learning Experiences (SCALE):
 - a. Collaborate with community partners and seek grant funding to develop and offer additional programming that aligns with workforce demands and student interests.
5. Ensure access to safe, welcoming and inclusive facilities:
 - a. Collaborate with the City of Somerville to develop a prioritization system to maintain optimal building conditions and proactively address potential concerns.
 - b. Prioritize the Winter Hill Community Innovation School and the Benjamin G. Brown School facilities, in pursuing facility renovations or projects.
 - c. Establish systems that are aligned with the City's Climate Forward Plan to achieve the current emission reduction targets of 50% by 2030, 90% by 2040, and 100% by 2050.

“Ensure access to safe, welcoming and inclusive facilities.”

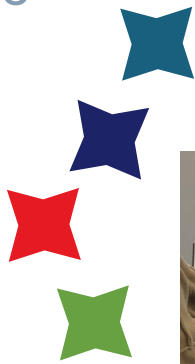
Priority #3 - Wellness & Joy

Proactively invest in wellness and joy to support student and staff well-being. We will achieve this by implementing the goals and action items below.

Goals and Action Items:

1. Strengthen implementation of evidenced-based and culturally responsive social and emotional PK-12 curriculum by academic year 2026-2027:
 - a. Align district-wide curriculum roll out and instructional practices utilizing Restorative Justice⁶, Second Step⁷ and Responsive Classroom⁸ frameworks. These frameworks will ensure a universal understanding across educators of the baseline conditions required for every student to progress in their wellness journeys and achieve academic success.
 - b. Conduct a district-wide assessment of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), accommodation plans and targeted interventions to better meet student academic and social-emotional readiness and ensure equitable application of best practices district-wide.

"Proactively invest in wellness and joy to support student and staff well-being."



⁶ Restorative Justice is an approach that focuses on creating community, trusting relationships, repairing harm, fostering accountability, and restoring relationships. It uses methods like facilitated conversations and restorative circles to promote healing and community building.

⁷ Second Step programs are research-based initiatives for Early Learning through Grade 8 that promote school success, connectedness, and a safe climate. They teach self-regulation and social-emotional skills while addressing challenging behaviors. These programs build on skills as students grow and set clear expectations for helping behaviors.

⁸ Responsive Classroom is an approach to teaching that promotes a positive learning environment by integrating social-emotional learning with academics. It emphasizes practices like morning meetings, positive teacher language, and collaborative problem-solving to build community and foster student success.

2. Create systems and leverage teams to promote wellness, prevent crisis, and proactively respond to students' needs on a systemic and individual basis:
 - a. Launch a district-wide Behavioral Health Support Team to include a Social Worker, Board Certified Behavioral Analyst, a Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) and district leaders. This team will provide technical assistance and timely hands-on support to increase educator capacity, enhance family engagement and proactively address student needs.
 - b. Develop teacher leaders to serve as Social and Emotional Learning Specialists for each PK-8 school to increase school-based capacity, promote wellness and respond to needs.
 - c. Partner with local world-class institutions to build district capacity and achieve enhanced role clarity and supports for social emotional learning teams and PK-12 educators and staff.
3. Enhance student community-building opportunities through the expansion of clubs, athletics, and other out-of-school time offerings.
4. Implement a system for acknowledging and showcasing educators and initiatives that demonstrate exceptional leadership.



“Create systems and leverage teams to promote wellness, prevent crisis, and proactively respond to students’ needs on a systemic and individual basis.”





Priority #4 - Family & Community Engagement

Strengthen family and community engagement to foster a collaborative system where families, community partners, and schools work together to help students to thrive. We will achieve this by implementing the goals and action items below.

Goals and Action Items:

1. Streamline communication to ensure easy access to information for families:
 - a. Engage families as partners with the Communications Department and Somerville Family Learning Collaborative (SFLC) in the co-creation of communication pathways.
 - b. Increase equitable access to information and resources for families by meeting them where they are, such as at school/community-centered events and programs.

“Streamline communication to ensure easy access to information for families.”



2. Leverage families as partners in learning, recognizing them as their children's first educators and as critical drivers of student success:
 - a. Create more opportunities for family involvement through activities such as classroom visits, and by sharing more information about curriculum, day-to-day classroom activities, homework policies and how families can support their children at home.
 - b. Review the format of parent-teacher conferences to better support meaningful discussion and collaboration.
3. Strengthen partnerships with local universities, businesses and community members to increase wraparound opportunities and supports for students and families.
 - a. Launch a city-wide literacy campaign



Acknowledgements

Thank you to all of the students, families, staff and community partners who participated in a focus group, root cause analysis session, strategy session and/or responded to the survey. Your voice and expertise have been invaluable to the development of this strategic plan. I look forward to continued partnership and collaboration as we move forward on a pathway of success.

Staff Acknowledgements

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