



Somerville Public Schools

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May 22, 2023

TO: Dr. Jessica Boston Davis, Assistant Superintendent of Academics

FROM: Kimberly Murphy-Baker, Interim Principal of West Somerville Neighborhood School

RE: School Improvement Plan (SIP) Memo to School Committee for the 2022-2023 School Year

CC: Dr. Jeff Curley, Interim Superintendent; SPS School Committee

School Mission

The West Somerville Neighborhood School focuses on building student writing, thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving to develop students with skills to become independent and self-sufficient adults who contribute responsibly to their community and the world.

Background/Information

The students who make up our school's population come from all over the City of Somerville. Our school reflects the overall demographics of the student population of Somerville Public Schools. Our student enrollment fluctuates between 375-410 students. The West Somerville Neighborhood School have one PreK class and two homerooms for all other grades K-8.

We have been working on centering student voices and student perspectives. This has included discovering barriers to partnership with students and identifying which of these barriers are systemic issues and which are ones that we have created and upheld. We have been developing our tool kits of strategies to uphold student dignity within the classroom culture by sharing power, building partnerships, and releasing control when appropriate.

Like all students in Somerville, our students are still recovering academically and socially-emotionally from the COVID 19 Pandemic. For the past few years our focus has been on managing the COVID environment and the re-entry to school after remote school. While the impacts of the pandemic are still with us and our students, this year we have directed our focus back to creating an inclusive school where all students can feel safe and make academic progress.

After reviewing past practices and school goals, the school leadership has identified three focus areas:

Equity Focus Area

Equity can have a lot of different definitions, depending on the context but, at its core, the concept involves giving everyone in a situation the specific tools that they need to be successful. In the classroom, promoting equity is about educators choosing to embrace rather than shy away from the unique backgrounds, identities, and experiences that their individual students bring to the table.

Our goal is for all children to feel good about who they are and what they can do, bringing their whole selves to school and their communities. When children show us and tell us who they are, trust them, believe them, embrace them.

All students deserve a safe, supportive school environment free of bias-based behavior. All students are scanning for safety.

Chart 1. Conditions for Learning student survey response to question SC10.

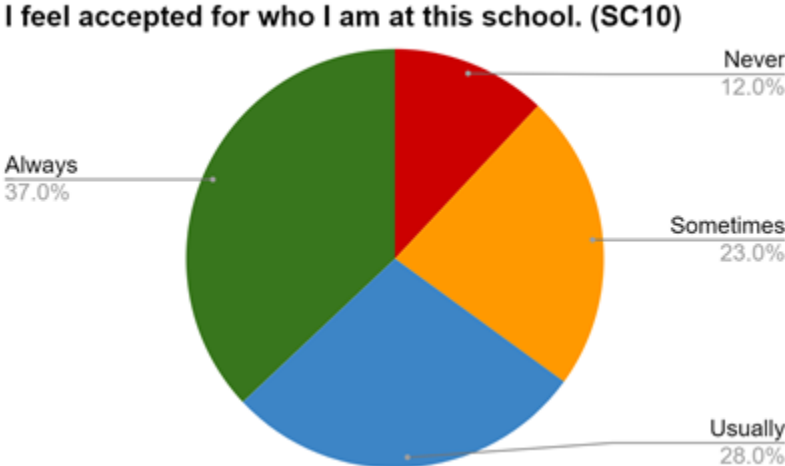
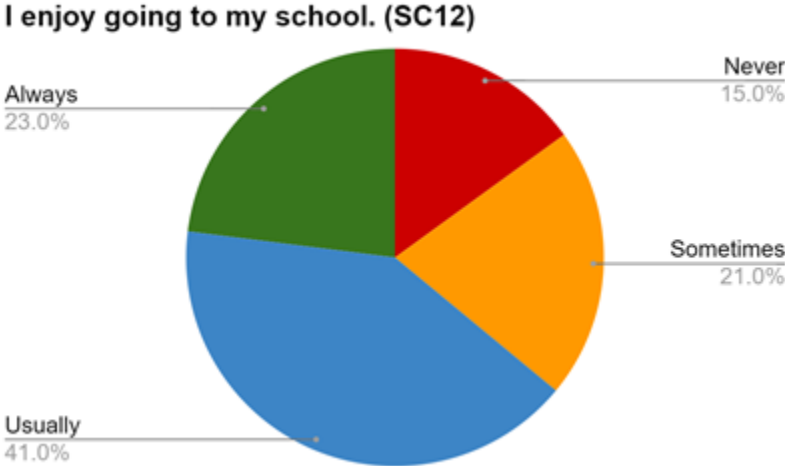


Chart 2. Conditions for Learning student survey response to question SC12.



After reviewing the internal survey data and the Conditions for Learning survey data, we were able to identify the following question as our problem of practice: how do we create safe and inclusive learning environments for our students to feel seen, heard, cared for, and celebrated?

Root Cause Analysis

Students didn't see themselves in the curriculum which could lead to feelings of not being represented in their learning environment. We had to take inventory of our reading materials and poster decorations and be mindful of how that reflects the identity of students in our school. We also needed to strategize how we could create a space for students to showcase and celebrate their culture with their peers. We began to work towards this celebration of culture through events where older students were partnered with younger students for cultural celebratory events and community circles. These changes have begun to open the door for educators to have their own conversations about how these events are impacting the sense of community in the building. This has also empowered educators to have difficult and uncomfortable conversations and handle challenging situations collaboratively. This work has been a start in the right direction, but we still have a lot of work to do.

Goal

Given training/ professional development opportunities, restorative justice, and curated events, 60% of our students will indicate that they feel they are in a safe and inclusive learning environment as indicated by the Conditions for Learning Survey.

The expected long-term outcome is the creation of a sense of community and emotional and physical safety. Some of the ways that we plan to measure students' feelings of belongingness and safety is through the reduction in the use of slurs, increase in attendance, and increase in students receiving counseling services. We also plan to monitor progress using the Conditions for Learning survey results.

Action Plan

Our problem statement is: how can we increase students' feelings of safety and belonging in our school community? One of the ways that we plan to increase students' feelings of belongingness is through the creation of spaces such as gender-neutral bathrooms. We want our students to feel supported and that they have spaces in the building reflective of their identity. This school year was our first whole school professional development session focused on LGBTQIA+ training. We wanted to discuss strategies for educators such as sharing pronouns when introducing ourselves and building common ground with students. We plan to continue reviewing our classroom reading materials to make sure it is reflective of our students' various identities. Additionally, we had professional development about how to best address conflict and bullying among students. One strategy that we plan to implement is the stop, care, name, claim, question protocol. This protocol calls for staff in the building to address bullying, slurs, or shunning by stopping said harmful behavior, checking in on the targeted student, naming the behavior, explaining how that behavior makes you feel, and asking questions to promote empathy and critical thinking. We also plan to continue leading a morning activity related to our "No Slur Pledge" which is connected to community building and collaboration.

We really hope to celebrate diversity through students' ability to discuss various traditions, celebrations, and depending on their beliefs and cultures. Lastly, we hope that students will be able to recognize and celebrate the differences in their beliefs.

To summarize our action plan and our anticipated outcomes, our theory of action for our equity focus is:

If we:

- Provide 3 professional development opportunities
- 2 lessons per grade focused on Restorative Justice

Then we will see:

- Slurs decrease and creating safe and inclusive environments
- Reduction of Office Referrals over a 3-year period
- Continue building classroom libraries
- Continue School-wide celebrations and events

Academic Focus Area

Educators help support student learning by creating an environment in which rich classroom discourse can take place. One question that we must consider is: what is discourse, and why is it important? Classroom discourse encompasses different types of written and spoken communication that happen in the classroom. Including representing, thinking, interpreting, expressing, reflecting, agreeing and disagreeing, and even debating and arguing.

We must support our students in practicing reasoning and expression of ideas. Rich classroom discourse offers students a way to express their ideas, reasoning, and thinking. Classroom discourse can be a central element of acquiring mathematical knowledge and understanding the nature of mathematics. As the notion that students need frequent and regular opportunities to express their thinking expands, it's time to rethink the current teaching model. We know that students can benefit from tackling challenging problems, with regular opportunities to express their thinking.

We must work with students to refine their communication and critical thinking skills. Facilitating productive struggle allows students to wrestle with mathematical ideas and think about how to approach a problem. Their thinking may result in a solution, or it may set the stage for them to be open to hearing someone else's strategy or solution, either another student's or the teacher's. The process of finding a path to an answer gives students the opportunity to communicate their thinking and reveal understandings or misunderstandings. When a student develops a strategy or approach based on sound mathematical understanding, communicating what he or she did can increase the likelihood that the student will be able to use or adapt that strategy in future situations.

We must serve and empower our vulnerable students, namely, multilingual learners. A teacher's first instinct may be to support English Language Learners by reducing the complexity of a mathematical word problem. In actuality, English Learners benefit greatly from increased mathematical discourse

because it provides the opportunity to engage in rich problems as they develop advanced language skills. Without such experiences, English Learners are likely to fall behind their English-proficient classmates.

Table 1. DIBELS results from the 2021-2022 school year and the 2022-2023 school year for West Somerville Neighborhood School students in grades K through 3.

Year	Performance	Fall	Winter	Spring
2021-2022	At or Above Grade Level	45.50%	56.90%	60.60%
	Below Grade Level	11.50%	14.90%	14.60%
	Well Below Grade Level	43.00%	28.20%	24.80%
2022-2023	At or Above Grade Level	55.80%	60.70%	~
	Below Grade Level	18.60%	13.70%	~
	Well Below Grade Level	25.60%	25.70%	~

Our DIBELS scores helped us identify students who were not on track for meeting our district wide reading proficiency standards as well as those who were at risk for reading difficulties. Students who were below grade level were identified to receive additional services. Teachers used progress monitoring scores to make sure students received the help they needed to improve and track their progression. For example, if a child is reading words accurately, but slowly, the teacher can provide extra practice re-reading stories and passages to improve his or her reading rate or fluency.

Teachers can review scores on DIBELS measures for all the students in a class to make decisions about how to prepare their day-to-day reading lessons. As a staff we can also study the test scores across classrooms and grade levels to make decisions about how to best use resources to make sure that every child in the school is on track to become an accurate and fluent reader.

We started this year with more students At or Above Grade Level, however, we need to do more with our students who are well below grade level. Students below grade level will be recommended for additional summer services. These students will also be given additional support at the start of the school year 2023-2024

Table 2. MCAS results from the Spring 2022 Math, ELA, and Science exams for West Somerville Neighborhood School students in grades 3-8.

Subject Area	Grade Level	%Exceeding	% Meeting	% Partially Meeting	% Not Meeting
ELA	3	22%	32%	38%	8%
	4	0%	59%	24%	17%
	5	0%	48%	45%	7%
	6	14%	35%	35%	16%

	7	2%	44%	34%	20%
	8	19%	33%	39%	8%
Math	3	13%	13%	33%	41%
	4	13%	47%	20%	20%
	5	0%	34%	59%	7%
	6	7%	49%	35%	9%
	7	3%	35%	43%	20%
	8	17%	33%	42%	8%
Science	5	3%	41%	45%	10%
	8	11%	36%	39%	14%

Our MCAS scores in ELA for Grade 3-8 range from 46% - 59% in Exceeding and Meeting the Standards while our Partially Meeting and Not Meeting range from 41% - 54%

While our Math MCAS scores range from 26% - 60% in Exceeding and Meeting the Standards while our Partially Meeting and Not Meeting 44% - 74% Grades 3,5, and 7 Math scores were considerably lower than the Grades 4, 5, and 6.

The following support and intervention processes need to be modified/improved in order to ensure we address the learning interests and growth needs of every student at our school, resulting in growth for every child:

- Frequent classroom assessments to adjust instruction in real time
- Strategically use Tier II Interventions (Reading teachers, X-Block, and After School Tutoring)
- Use Common Planning Time to improve collaboration for teacher teams and special educators
- Use benchmarked assessments for early identification
- PD on small group instruction (more individualized instruction related to data)

Root Cause Analysis

These numbers show the long-term academic impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic. These impacts of the pandemic continue to cause persistent achievement gaps for our students. We need to dig deeper to examine our Tier 1 Instruction in Grades that were below 50% in Exceeding and Meeting the Standards.

Vertical alignment and consistency in practices and teaching strategies. Using teacher meetings to identify skill/learning gaps early and reteach material throughout the year as needed. Putting supports in place to address existing gaps to prevent further decline. Identifying next steps to ensure students are able to access all content, develop math proficiency, and improve this academic performance.

Goal

We will increase the percentage of students Exceeding and Meeting the Standard by 10% in both Math and ELA.

Action Plan

Our problem statement is: how do we empower students to engage in academic discourse? Given professional development and observation feedback our classrooms will engage in daily academic discourse; increasing use of academic language and conventions of conversations. Students will be able to have 3-4 conversational exchanges; able to express an opinion and defend their position. Measured by observation feedback and student use of language during discussion and tests.

Teachers identified standards of concern, teaching objective, students who need support, strategies to reteach, as well as reteach activity, timeline, reteach date, and reassessment plan and date. Supporting knowing all students. Teachers were given time to collaborate, connect with colleagues and families.

To summarize our action plan and our anticipated outcomes, our theory of action for our academic focus is:

If we:

- Build a habit of regularly assessing student discourse, re-teaching, re-assessing throughout the unit
- Create a plan for selected students that is specific and prioritizes student voice as well as the most important concepts and skills
- Identify and verbalize the underlying misconceptions and sources of error that students exhibited

Then we will see:

- Previewing upcoming units/assessments in our Common Plan Meetings, PD, and independently
- Small grouping of students will allow more students to be heard allowing more student discourse on the topic.
- Flexible across classrooms to more efficiently target certain skills
- Assessing, re-teaching, and re-assessing regularly throughout the unit, not just at the end of the unit

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Focus Area

The goal of social- emotional learning is for students to develop five core competencies: Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Self-Management, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making. When equipped with these competencies, children are better prepared to socialize productively and understand their emotions. Social-emotional skills carry through into adulthood which is why it's so important for educators to teach them from a young age.

The Mediation Program for Somerville Public Schools provides conflict resolution services to all schools in the district. Mediation is a method of resolving differences between individuals or groups using a neutral third party who listens to both sides of the conflict to create understanding between them and

explore possible solutions. Under adult supervision, student mediators who have participated in a 2-day training program, assist their peers in arriving at a mutually satisfactory agreement. The program promotes peaceful resolution of conflicts and cooperation and tolerance through group work, activities and classroom workshops.

Peer Mediation Training Between last school year (21-22) and this school year (22-23), there have been 12 student mediators trained at West Somerville Neighborhood School. The students reflect the student body in regards to race, gender, ethnicity and background. The peer mediators support the mediation program by working out conflicts with their peers and keeping the peace at WSNS.

Figure 1. The number and types of reported incidents at the West Somerville from September through June of the 2021-2022 school year.

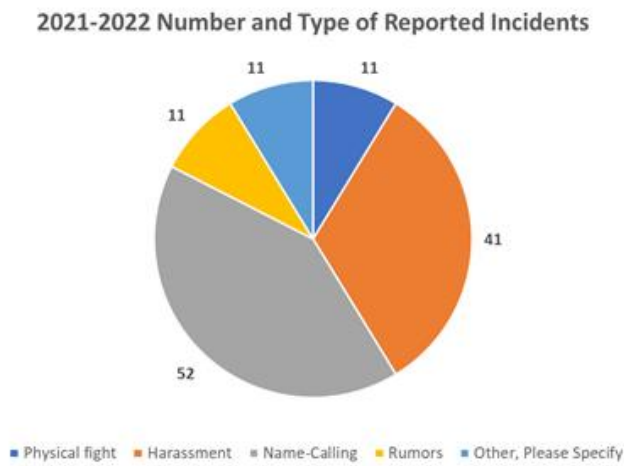


Figure 2. The number and types of reported incidents at the West Somerville from September through April of the 2022-2023 school year.

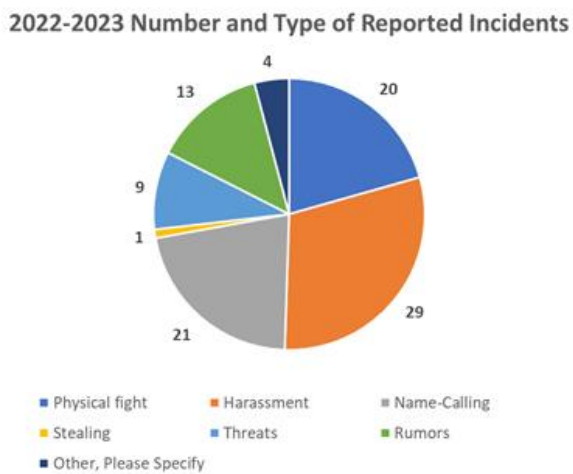


Table 3. A few additional data points around incidents and mediation.

School Year 2021-2022	School Year 2022-2023
Of 85 total reported incidents, 60 were referred to mediation. Of the 60 incidents referred to mediation, all individuals involved in the incidents were able to reach an agreement. There were no agreements broken following mediation.	Of 97 total reported incidents thus far, 68 were referred to mediation. Of the 68 incidents referred to mediation, all individuals involved in the incidents were able to reach an agreement. There was 1 agreement broken following mediation.
The majority of incidents reported involved students in grades 3, 6, and 7.	The majority of incidents reported involved students in grades 5, 7, and 8.
There have been 12 WSNS students trained as peer mediators over the last two years.	

Root Cause Analysis

Learning to read, write, take part in a discussion, solve mathematical problems, requires attention, organization, comprehension, memory, and the ability to produce work, engagement in learning and trust. Another prerequisite for achieving classroom competency is the ability to self-regulate attention, emotions, and behavior.

Traumatic experiences have the power to undermine the development of linguistic and communication skills and compromise the ability to attend to classroom tasks and instructions, organize and remember new information, and grasp cause and effect-all of which are necessary to processing formation effectively.

We need to deepen our shared understanding of how trauma impacts learnings. We need to help effectively support all students to feel safe physically, socially, emotionally, and academically. Address students' needs in holistic ways, taking into account their: relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being. We need to connect students to the school community and provide multiple opportunities for students to practice newly developing skills throughout the school.

Goal

We will see the 20% reduction of mediation and a 20% decrease in bullying referrals.

Action Plan

Our problem statement is: how do we support students as they learn to self-regulate and resolve conflicts as they mature at West Somerville? We will administer a student survey about mental health and for all students in Grades 4-8. We will work to decrease referrals for outpatient therapy and mediation. Students will be able to resolve conflicts independent of staff, and students will decrease in time spent out of the classroom. Students will be able to identify and express feelings appropriately and there will be a

decrease in time spent discussing students in common planning. Data will be collected through school social worker, mediator, and teacher referrals. Impact of COVID and lack of social interaction has had a significant impact.

Educators collaborated with colleagues to plan community building activities. Educators also debriefed lessons regarding equity and inclusion activities as a floor in order to build inter- grade cohesion. Measured by Whole School Conditions for Learning Survey March 2023.

Trauma informed strategies and practices supporting students who are dysregulated.

To summarize our action plan and our anticipated outcomes, our theory of action for our social emotional focus is:

If we:

- Provide 12 weeks of research based social emotional learning instruction

Then we will see:

- A 20% reduction of mediation and bullying referral