

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

Monday, July 27, 2020 - Regular Meeting

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

Members present: Ms. Krepchin, Dr. Ackman, Ms. Barish, Ms. Normand, Mr. Green, Ms. Pitone, Dr. Phillips and Mayor Curtatone.

Members absent: President McLaughlin.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Normand called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. with a moment of silence, followed by a salute to the flag of the United States of America.

Chair Normand asked the Superintendent to call the roll, results of which were as follows: PRESENT – 8 – Ms. Krepchin, Ms. Pitone, Ms. Barish, Mr. Green, Dr. Ackman, Ms. Normand, Dr. Phillips and Mayor Curtatone. ABSENT – 1 - Mr. McLaughlin

Chair Normand announced that the bulk of this meeting would be for public comment, given the complexity of the current times and the decision at hand regarding school reopening. Before the start of Public Comment, she called the first item of new business out of order, to accommodate the attendance of Fran Gorski, Director of Finance and Facilities for the School District.

II. NEW BUSINESS ITEM A TAKEN OUT OF ORDER

A. Approval of Reopening Grants

Mr. Gorski explained that there were 3 separate grants in the packet for School Committee approval; The ESSER Fund portion of The CARES Act to address academic needs, the CvRF School Reopening Grant to address any COVID-19 related costs such as furniture and technology and The Remote Learning Technology Essentials Grant, a matching grant released by The Commonwealth to cover a portion of the District's remote learning costs, including hot spots and the purchase of Chromebooks.

Mr. Gorski explained each grant in further detail. For the ESSER Fund the District is applying for the 2021 portion of the grant. This is the Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief Fund and these dollars will be used mainly to address academic needs, such as social emotional and Special Education needs. This grant has been designed to be utilized to have a wide flexibility based upon Title One and Special Education guidelines. The CvRF School Reopening Grant has just been released. This grant is based upon \$225 per pupil and was also designed with wide flexibility for whatever needs districts throughout the Commonwealth have. This would typically be used for PPE purchases through technology, furniture and the like, as long as they are related to COVID-19 expenses.

Mr. Gorski also pointed out the dates for each grant. The ESSER Funding is for expenses through September 30, 2022. For the School Reopening Grant, the \$225 per pupil is eligible for expenses from March through December 30th of the current calendar year. This is priority funding to immediately tap into. The application has been submitted for the Remote Learning Technology Essentials Grant. This grant is going to be based on the relative wealth of districts, so we're not quite sure exactly how much money is going to be awarded. But it is expected to cover a portion of the additional Chromebooks that need to be purchased.

Chair Noman then asked committee members for a motion to approve these grants.

MOTION: There was a motion by Mr. Green, seconded by Dr. Ackman, to approve the ESSER Fund portion of the CARES ACT Grant, the CvRF School Reopening Grant and the Remote Learning Technology Essentials Grant.

Mr. Green inquired about the specific amounts of these grants and requested they be distributed in a memo to committee members. Mr. Gorski responded that for the ESSER Grant after equitable distribution we're looking at about \$946,000 and for the Reopening Grant that number is just under \$1.1 million. As stated, for the matching grant the amount has not been disclosed. A memo with these numbers would follow.

The motion to approve all three grants was approved via roll call vote.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

Prior to the start of Public Comment, Chair Normand asked Superintendent Skipper and Mayor Curtatone to share their remarks.

Mayor Curtatone led with a recap of the context needed for the general public of where the City stands working in collaboration with the School District on the issue of school reopening; what they know, what the challenges are at this moment and how they're approaching these challenges.

For COVID-19 we have flattened out the curve successfully in Massachusetts and in Somerville, though we continue and need to be vigilant. There is concern that people's guards are down and this may cause an uptick of cases in certain regions, but that remains to be seen and so they are taking precaution with anything that raises the risk of transmission from person to person. This is troubling because the greatest concern right now is to keep people healthy and safe, prevent transmission and to continue to be successful so that we can open schools and get families back to work. To boost the economy but also to provides the necessary support children need so badly right now. We know their development educationally and socially emotionally has taken a hit because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Right now, this challenge has been dumped on cities and towns across the Commonwealth, and there is no clear path. The district is required to give the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education three scenarios of one, what schools look like with all kids back in school at once, which Somerville has already collaboratively announced is not a possibility because it is not realistic. Two, everyone starting the school year virtually and not attending any in person classes, or the third being some type of hybrid model.

The Mayor reiterated that this is where the city is in conjunction with the school district to try to understand how to accomplish any version of going back to school in a way that ensures the health and safety of teachers, staff, students and their families, and the general public. This requires the operational model and the operations and physical plant of the school buildings to support the educational model, and whatever the goals are as a school district. This poses some challenges as there are some buildings that are very old as well as the high school being under construction. The city is trying to understand what would need to be addressed from an operational perspective in order to maintain a certain level of air filtration and exchange with outside air and allow for safe social distancing, to support the educational model, in order to start operationalizing at the beginning of September. This is something that is ongoing and the Superintendent will go a little bit more into that as she discusses what we're faced with on the educational side and how the operations piece has to support that.

He shared that on top of that, everything has to reconcile against the overall health protocols and safety guidelines. The City is presently working with the Cambridge Health Alliance and consulting other experts to understand how and what the model of surveillance testing should be and can it be achieve. So when we start coming back into schools physically, no matter what the phasing is or what the hybrid model looks like, there is a model in place that could be successfully executed, and helps track and trace how the pandemic is evolving not just in the overall community but specifically in the school community. This is a bit of a challenge right now but there will be a plan and approach presented to the School Committee and the general public.

He added that as a parent of kids in the Somerville Public Schools he wants nothing more than for kids to be back in schools physically, like the overwhelming majority people. Not only do we have to come up with an educational model or plan around a virtual or hybrid model or both, as things can change for the worse or better due to the pandemic. But we need to make sure the operational piece and how we are maintaining, sanitizing and adapting the physical plant of the buildings, supports that. And then on the health side we need to ensure how we're achieving our health goals, a testing plan and a contact tracing plan. All these things have to come to place in a synchronized and coordinated way to support any model of coming back to school.

Superintendent Skipper then read a statement she prepared for the meeting.

This past March the COVID-19 Pandemic certainly lived up to the meaning of pandemic impacting all parts of our community: students, staff, parents, businesses, and community partners. one thing we clearly know is there are no easy solutions to the problem as complex as COVID. But since March, and certainly, as we move through the summer months, we continued to try to find the best solution is for all members of our Somerville community. As in

any crisis, it's important to try to name our values and to use those values as grounding for making little and big decisions. There are three that are especially important to us as we approach this re-opening and the new academic year.

First and foremost, always the health and safety of our school community. And this is a school community that has a sacred bond that is our students, our staff, and our families, all with varying levels of risk but with a common need to care for one another. Through, always the lens of equity. Certainly, we need to look at the impact to all. But there are some groups that we know from data were disproportionately impacted by the closure and by COVID itself. For instance, our newcomer ELL students, our Special Education students, particularly those in any of our self-contained programs, such as our autism, medically fragile, social emotional, our pre K to two, our youngest students, and those students who could not access remote learning back in March, because of access issues; parents working on the frontlines or support for those students who had home or food insecurity issues. These are all students that we know from the data were disproportionately impacted and we need to make sure they're a priority in our re-opening.

And finally, in terms of values, the commitment to a healthy process. It's transparent and inclusive in the process and the challenges and in the possible solutions. It's certainly the grounding of our multiple weekly updates that took place during the closure, and it's the basis of seeking input from a variety of means, our surveys our town halls, school committee meetings, like tonight. Throughout June and July, we've been working as a learning community to plan for what a fall re-opening could look like. And that's certainly one that is unlike any of us had ever experienced before. We have three plans due to DESE; July 31st is a survey plan, and then August 10th will be the full plan. And this is to address a three prong approach, one which would bring all students back in person at one time. A hybrid, which in our case, could either be a week on week off or it could be a two-day model of a cohort A and then a two-day model of a cohort B with Wednesday's being a full remote, and then, of course a fully remote option. Critical to the process has been, and will continue to be to find ways for stakeholders to share their voice and expertise. A few of the key committees that have come into existence or are being formed in our process for this particular purpose has been one from almost the inception of the emergency leave, our City, and district re-opening Task Force, where our City and District Departments come together on a regular basis to share information and manage the crisis. The Environmental, Health and Safety Task Force, which is newly formed. And has DPW Facilities, Health Services, as well as our union representation and some of our key departments in the school district all around the table to be able to look specifically at health and safety issues.

PD courses, which we have offered that have given educators the chance to look at literature and research on various the opening models and topics, and then share their thoughts and their recommendations. Grade span teams, which have looked at the guidance regarding questions of teaching, learning and curriculum and what possible recommendations or solutions could be. And school based re-opening teams, which are in the process of being launched over the next few weeks and will stay in place all year long. Not only is implementation teams to help the principal and leadership team, but also as review committees to constantly be reviewing data, and figuring out what we can do better in our processes. And then, finally, one that's been pretty unique, which is the district management group, which is affiliated to Harvard Business School. And here, we've come together in a unique partnership with Salem and Cambridge Public Schools to share the common challenges and solutions for re-opening. We review best practices that are happening around reopening across the nation. And most importantly, we peer review are re-opening plans so that we can look at how they're developing and changing and what we might be able to learn from one another.

We appreciated the various pieces of guidance that have come out of DESE. Sometimes, however, the guidance has not come in a timely manner or addressed concerns that are unique to urban districts like ours. In each case, we strive not only to meet the guidance but to exceed it and fundamentally to do what is right for the Somerville Public Schools, even our city's unique density, programming and disparate impact of the virus on our communities of color. Our ongoing planning and desire to meet and or exceed the SEC safety recommendations has led us to use six-foot social distance measure, not the three. It's led us to require masks at pre-K to 12, to order and secure all types of PPE, gloves, masks clear masks for language learners, gowns, face shields, room sanitizers, etc. To contract with the ventilation firm to assess all of our school buildings, make recommendations for any additional modifications we may need to make to better the ventilation and filtration. To work in collaboration with our City, as the Mayor indicated, to try to put into place a process for surveillance testing for our school community. To develop safety protocols for food prep, and transport to classrooms, and outdoor areas to minimize the congregating of students. To order new furniture and reconfigure learning spaces at better accommodate the six-foot social distance. To order bins,

backpacks and school supplies that minimized need for students to share instructional materials. To secure additional Chromebooks and hotspots to the students in K-12, and those needing connectivity can fully access. These are just to name a few of all that we have worked on thus far.

As we announced this past Friday and as the Mayor indicated, are processing the decision to use six foot as our social distance guideline, does not make it possible for us to bring all of our students physically back at one time for the start of school, we believe it's a safety issue. Although we will provide the State with the required plans that address the full in-person, the hybrid and the remote options, we're choosing to focus and put energy toward developing out the hybrid and remote options for the start of school. As these two models need to coexist together, and districts need to be able to move fluidly, from the hybrid to remote and remote to hybrid depending on the trajectory of the virus and the advice of health officials. Both the hybrid and the remote models reflect changes in the school schedule and working conditions, and therefore, they need impact bargaining with the unions. A process within planning for and look forward to, to work collaboratively in the coming weeks.

In short term, we will continue to work through the remaining challenges, and there are many relative to things like bus transportation, staff medical accommodations and personnel leave needs, substitute models, testing capacity for staff, making necessary modifications to buildings ventilation and filtration, seeking outdoor classroom solutions, and these are just to name a few. These will be tackled over the coming weeks, fast and furious, and on a daily basis. In the longer term, we will work hard and look forward to a time when our whole community can safely be re-united, where all students and staff can come back every day as they did prior to March. But the virus and the data will determine when that time will be possible. As a district, we, and I want to thank everyone for their patience, their flexibility, and their collaboration during, what is by far, one of the most complex, and stressful times we've faced as a community. We will do this as we do everything in Somerville, as a strong and caring community.

Chair Normand then, on behalf of the School Committee, thanked all of the educators, staff, community partners, city partners, the families and guardians we've heard from, and the students we've heard from about how the spring when, what they're hoping for and what they need from us as a community. She encouraged everyone to attend School Committee, email or call to share their comments.

She then read the public comment guidelines and invited those who signed up to comment to do so in the order called. She announced that Somerville Public School's non-resident staff would be allowed to comment and speakers would be allotted 2 minutes each.

Because this meeting was specifically scheduled for Public Comment below we've tried to capture each person's comment, even if it was not submitted for the minutes by the speaker.

Adam McLean, ESCS Music Teacher

First, I would like to say thank you to all of you for your continued support of Music and arts education in the Somerville Public schools. The support represents your commitment to the whole child and to the social emotional learning of every student. Music is a cultural necessity and a human right, and it remains a critical part of public education during the pandemic. As a music teacher, I would like to share my perspective about the in person components of the hybrid model. In this model, staff like me, who work with multiple cohorts still have a high level of exposure to many students, which increases the health risk for us as educators, as well as for all the students we see. This is true for any staff member who works with multiple cohorts as well, including but not limited to, Drama Teachers, Library Teachers, Art teachers, PE teachers, Reading Specialists, Resource Room staff, as well as most middle grades and High School teachers.

Furthermore, I invite you to consider Maslow's hierarchy of needs, in order for students to experience self-growth they first need to have their physiological and safety needs met. During in person instruction the focus of most of the school day would be on hygienic procedures, even in a hybrid model. Maslow teaches us that meaningful learning is not just difficult, but it's actually impossible when students are not in a safe and healthy environment. Likewise, with teachers fearing for our own safety, it is impossible for us to do meaningful planning and teaching until our safety is guaranteed. Given the current state of the pandemic, it is clear that the only viable option for the beginning of the school year is fully remote instruction. I would also add with respect to that until the School Committee is again, meeting in person, no SPS staff should be asked to meet in person in any model. Thank you for your time and for your attention to this matter, which is of the utmost importance.

Vivian Abraham, 5 Glenwood Road, Parent of a rising high school freshmen.

My personal experience, as a parent of a special needs child, during the spring was that it was incredibly difficult. It was basically like I was working two jobs. It was working full-time from home and also doing all of the teaching and all of the Special Ed support, except for just a few hours a week that my son had with his teachers. His teachers were very dedicated, and I know they did a lot of hard work on this. But any model that is online predominantly needs to keep students more engaged during class and give them more support for the work they have to do at home. It to allow students to have the social interactions that are vital to the school experience and to support special needs kids and help them to build those executive function and social emotional skills. I really appreciate everybody's hard work on this. Thank you so much.

Vanessa Buttolph, SPS Instrumental Teacher

I would like to talk on behalf of the instrumental teachers and the High School Music Department. There are a few issues that I would like to discuss: the first is regarding the high school schedule that is now proposing that high school music ensembles meet from 3 to 3:45, 4 days a week. This brings up two issues; the first is that it would require licensed K-12 teachers to teach after the school day ends. This competes with athletics and extracurricular activities. It also causes inequity to rotating teachers who are in and out of the building, due to the size of the department that would require high school music teachers to remain in the building every week. Additionally, this re-categorized music ensembles as an after school enrichment option, which again would compete with athletics, part-time job employment, and other afterschool activities for our students. This will undoubtedly hurt the music program, will place music in the light of optional and not necessary and remove it as a substantial core part of every student's curriculum. This is going backwards, not forwards. It will impact our enrollment and removed performing arts education from the rich daily academic experience now available to students at Somerville High School. This could severely impact part-time staff who rely on teaching additional music after school, who teach in all city music ensembles and to teachers who are dependent on being home after school for childcare and other reasons. One question that has risen is whether other departments are also being asked to make the same sacrifice. Beyond this, I just also wanted to bring up a couple more issues regarding general music teachers, instrumental teachers, and district wide teachers. I can speak from personal experience, I teach in rooms with no windows, hallways without adequate ventilation or space for social distancing. I teach at four different schools. So in the case I was to contract of it, there's issues regarding contact tracing. In general, specialty teachers see hundreds of students. And with all of this said, DESE has said, "It is an integral part of the learning experience for every student at every grade level." And this is regarding art and music. My biggest concern is that moving ahead with either remote or hybrid plans, that all specialty and instrumental music teachers be considered, because we are a core part of the curriculum, we're a core part of the school day and that needs to be highly considered. Thank you.

Swetha Kalluri, 5 Cherry Street, Sixth grade teacher at the Kennedy School.

I'm here today to speak to you about why remote learning is the only way that we can re-open our school safely. In a socially distant education, students will not be allowed to collaborate, approach their teacher or get help from their teacher within six feet and will need to stay in their seats working independently all day. We are talking about children, not robots or machines. Children cannot just flip a switch and follow guidelines that do not match their experience of school being a place where they get to see and interact with their teachers and their friends. Even in a hybrid model, there will be breeches to protocols every single day and members of our school community will pay, some with their lives and others with permanent damage to their health. In a hybrid model teacher will be expected to teach in person and remotely at the same time in addition to managing social distancing, enforcing mass keys and maintaining sanitizing procedures. We cannot teach and our students cannot learn under these conditions. We should be investing our time and resources into making remote learning the best that it can be. We should be ensuring that all students have a device an Internet access, are provided with supply kits support their learning and every subject, and that teachers are provided with professional development to develop remote teaching strategies. I know that my colleagues and I can make remote learning an engaging and equitable experience for our students. Do the right thing, and choose to start a school remotely, and keep our staff and students safe and healthy. Thank you for your time.

Rebecca Brown, 5 Maxwell's Green, parent and Paraprofessional at the Kennedy School

I must insist that we do a gradual re-opening of the schools with remote learning to start. I know that no matter what happens, my daughter will not be attending in school learning no matter what the decision is. And also my conscience cannot allow for my medically fragile students to be exposed and put at risk. If I'm exposed, my students

are exposed. Also, the entire therapy team will be exposed. Also, my daughter will be exposed, which will expose all of the seventh and eighth grade team, including all 70 or 80 students at our school. And I don't know what's going to happen if this happens. This is a big concern, and I feel like there's no way to have this happen. I would also like to make sure that our medically fragile students are being taken into account into this, because they're often overlooked. Thank you.

David Nurenberg, 8 Dickson St

To the Committee, the Superintendent and the Mayor, I do not envy the decisions you're now tasked with making. It is no exaggeration to say that lives hang in the balance. As a 20-year veteran public school teacher and as a professor and scholar of education, I am well aware of the body of research indicating the remote teaching results versus in person classes, that student's social emotional health benefits from the support of a school environment, particularly, out most vulnerable children, and of course, as a parent of two SPS students, I recognize how parents and guardians rely on schools for childcare while they're at work. But at the same time, none of these goals, not learning, not socio emotional community support, not even childcare can be met if COVID- 19 is running rampant, through our schools, sickening, and even killing students, families and teachers. In this situation, we must regard 100% remote learning at least from the offset for all of its drawbacks, as the lesser of two evils. It is bad for learning, it's better than hospitalization and death. Any degree of school reopening that forces parents and teachers to assume a degree of risk and forces them to play odds with the lives of their children and teachers. Yes, there has been guidance provided from health officials, I don't mean to denigrate their work. But due to the circumstances such guidance has been insufficiently tested and depends upon strict adherence that real fallible human beings can't be relied rather follow perfect. I've announced my role as a public scholar to share best practices for hybrid or fully in-person classrooms in the era of COVID, I have responded there aren't any. In a best case scenario, teaching and learning will be highly difficult for so many reasons. I repeat this is one of those once in a generation times were humble public officials like yourselves who lives in the balance with your decision. There is no perfect decision here. But there is a right decision, please restrict school to remote until there is a proven vaccine or treatment. Thank you.

Emily Fishman, Speech language Therapist at the Capuano School.

I have two main points: staffing flexibility and high needs priority. First, staffing flexibility, I'm concerned about staff such as myself who work with students across many classrooms. The moment calls for thinking way outside the box. Maybe the service providers consult daily and I provide OT and PT speech counseling, and vision services to the students in two classrooms, while another provider oversees all services for another two classrooms. At minimum, we should arrange classroom lists and caseloads based on who is electing to stay home and who is in school, to lower the demand of teaching in person and online simultaneously. Second, we need to get some students into the buildings before others. My young students have high support needs. They're already behind their peers and their abilities to care for themselves, communicate and problem solve for daily life. Many have regressed significantly since March, despite staff and family best efforts. They require specialized instruction beyond what a general education teacher can give them. Never mind what parents have the capacity to support. Many cannot access any services digitally in a meaningful way. These are students who must have priority to return to the buildings. We also need to think about students whose families cannot get them to online education in spite of our flexibility for any number of factors. This may indeed come at the expense of students from lower need households and profiles, particularly in pre K, where provision of education is not mandated. I understand that families will struggle, but we must prioritize students whose futures will be irrevocably devastated the longer this educational interruption continues. This is the meaning of equity in 2020. Thank you.

Gabrielle Jacquet, 24 Appleton Street

I am Somerville Public School parent, an Academic Emergency Physician, and a Public Health Practitioner with extensive experience working in epidemics. I am an essential worker on the front lines every day and I strongly believe that our teachers are central workers too. Throughout this time, I have never worked remotely. And I've been on the frontlines caring for patients and following strict PPE guidelines, myself and my colleagues have not gotten sick while doing this. In my practice, I'm sad to report that I've also been taking care of children who have been abused and neglected or suffered from other consequences attributed from school closure. My concern for remote learning is particularly, our youngest learners, our learners with special needs and IEPs, and our learners who are learning English as a second language. They are going to suffer without the benefits of in person learning, and I believe we're going to see these consequences for many years to come. I'm also concerned because of talking to other parents and the formation of virtual learning pods, which will most certainly exacerbate inequities, racial and cultural segregation, and the opportunity gap within our schools and our town that isolates students from their

peers and importantly from their teachers. While virtual learning may sound safer to sum, it brings with it the risk of increased child abuse, neglect, food insecurity, and mental health instability. There is a small risk with re-opening as well. But I believe we should prioritize re-opening schools during this pandemic. The numbers support it if you look at the infection rates and the WHO guidelines, and I'm happy to elaborate more offline. Masking and distancing, especially with the six-foot limit, has worked well in summer camps, including with the Somerville Recreation Department. And I believe we can do it in our school system as well. We can use things such as outdoor learning and be creative and think outside the box. We can also implement a district based testing initiative, and I'm happy to provide contacts to make this happen. The AAP also endorses this as well given our local numbers and infection rates. Finally, there's a wealth of expertise and our parent community to please help get our children back to the classroom where they can learn and benefit from all the wonderful things that are essential worker teachers do, thank you.

Angelique Murillo, Ward 3 - 60 Putnam St, Clinical Coordinator of the SKIP Program at the Kennedy School. For the past few weeks I've been talking to friends and fellow educators and have been really flabbergasted at the fact that we're even considering opening schools back in person without a vaccine. And then, I realized that as an educator, I'm somewhat to blame. 33 is the number of lunches that I sacrificed from September to March. 27 is the number of prep periods that I sacrificed because I was needed by a student, or in a meeting. 4 days of vacation I sacrifice because I was on the phone with providers or parents, because kids needed me, \$530.89 I sacrificed because I needed to buy supplies for my kids. Never once did I say this was unfair, never once did I speak to my supervisor about this not being okay. But now I'm being asked to sacrifice my life. Now, I'm being asked to potentially sacrifice the life of my father-in-law, who's on chemo. I'm potentially being asked to have my kids not spend Christmas with their grandfather because you're asking me to walk into an unsafe situation, you're asking me to walk into a classroom where we can't even hold the meeting in person. We know that this isn't safe, this isn't fair. Please do not ask me to sacrifice this. I sacrifice so much for this job. Please, don't ask me to sacrifice my family, my kids, myself or my colleagues. Florida reported a 23% increase in kids being hospitalized because of COVID-19. We will undeniably bury a student, please don't make that sacrifice.

Lindsey Tosches, 5 Cherry Street

Sending teachers, students, and staff back into the building to meet in the school year will create an unsafe workplace and learning environment. Since March 11th, I have followed recommended guidelines to keep myself and my family healthy. Returning to school means an end to seeing and caring for the people I love most. By sending me back to school, you are devaluing my life outside of the workplace and putting my health at risk. By sending us back to school, you are devaluing and endangering the city population especially our most vulnerable families. If there's one illness or worse, one death among staff, students, families due to the virus, it will be too many. Many skeptics in the city, state and across the country have slam teachers in the spring educational experience. What they dismiss is the fact that teachers, unlike other frontline workers, who have been praised for their efforts, had approximately 20 hours to realign their jobs with little training, resources, and even less guidance. We cannot have a fixed mindset going into the school year. To anticipate the worst outcomes, failures and ineffectiveness of teachers only perpetuates this. Rather than spending time on fear and enhancing inequities by implementing an unsafe learning model, I urge you to consider the following. Let us begin the year in the remote learning model and provide us tutors for students and families with the right tools and resources. Let go of saying they can't and they won't and embrace a growth mindset, provide us with the resources to do our jobs and start believing that they can and they will. We cannot continue on the same educational path. Everything has changed and we must now change the system. The push for in person learning should not trump what we know to be the best scientific and public health practices. Remember, the decisions you make will have long term effects on the health and well-being of this community. Thank you.

Margaret Whittier-Ferguson, Pre-K Paraprofessional at the Capuano School

I want to make it clear that we need to be actively engaging with educators in the community around the issue of re-opening school. 84% of the Somerville Teachers Association prefers remote instruction to start in the fall. But the reality is that many of our students need in person learning as soon as public health metrics dictate that it is safe. But those metrics are not currently being met. Just like the paraprofessional campaign, we need to build a strong movement of educators and families to ensure a safe re-opening for students and educators. Educators and families should be deciding when and how we re-open. In order for in person learning to be safe, we need a massive overhaul of school infrastructure. 53% of schools nationwide need repair, and Somerville is no exception. There should be a massive job program to revamp school infrastructure while we begin remote learning in the fall.

Additionally, families need rent and mortgage freezes and free emergency childcare services as well as high quality Internet access and devices for all students so they don't have to share with siblings at home. Educators are going to need a massive amount of PPE, particularly in Special Education classrooms and early education. The reality is that our students are going to be coming back incredibly dysregulated and we need to map and increase staffing to decrease class sizes to at most, 10 students per class, even if we're going remote. We need more counselors, nurses, teachers, and paraprofessionals, and this additional staff should be kept on to ensure class faith beyond this crisis. As the pre-K educator, I'm very concerned about the health and safety of my students and their families. While remote learning is not ideal for 4 and 5-year-old, I have faith in my colleague to make it work while we are fully investing in our public schools and making them pay for an in person return. The school committee should be calling for fully funded public schools at a statewide level to ensure we can properly phase in re-opening schools in person. Thank you.

Diana Young, Argenziano School teacher

I fully support a remote start to the school year for the safety of all students and staff. I do not believe a hybrid model is feasible at this point. Even in small groups and alternating days, everyone will still have the same amount of exposure by being in the same class. There are also issues of bathrooms, especially in the younger grades. My kindergarten classroom includes a bathroom but the kindergarten across the hall does not. We've always shared this bathroom, but this would not work in a hybrid model. I also think it's really important for families to know that if kindergarten students are back in school in September, it will not be like regular kindergarten. Students will be sitting alone and probably doing lots of worksheets and there will be no circle time or interactive morning meeting. Finally, every year during the first few days there are plenty of tears saying goodbye to families, typically students come down quickly after holding my hand or sitting close for a story or getting a big hug, I can't imagine the amount of tears this year will bring. I honestly have no idea how to comfort a crying child from six feet away. So, for any parent listening, please imagine saying goodbye to your crying child outside the building knowing that any comfort they will get from a teacher will be them with them wearing a mask from 6 feet away. Thank you.

Ian Umansky, Career and Technical Education Teacher

I do not feel that there's any safe way to start classes with the hybrid learning system. The Edge really is an old building with no HVAC system whatsoever, there is nothing to circulate the air in the building. We have a window air conditioner that could blow air into the room and the air couldn't leave the room through the window right next to it even if it was open. There are four to ceiling partitions in the room. Parents have always sent their kids to school sick and there's nothing that convinces me it would stop in these times. We all know about the asemantic cases of COVID-19. The concern about social emotional for students regarding remote learning is not really a factor due to the social distancing requirements. The students that are in school will lose more time while the educator is using social distancing effort. Students would most likely be better off with all their time and efforts in directed to remote learning. one extra death would far away to temporary bearing the face of an earlier opening. The fund Mr. Gorski just spoke about that are available for PPE or technology would be better spent on technology to better remote learning. These items will be available for years to come, not expended in the crisis.

Jane Gardner, SPS Educator (Submitted her comment to be included in these minutes)

Remote learning is the safest form of learning for everyone. Anyone who has a weak immune system or has been exposed to someone who has the virus is able to pass it on to someone else, no matter what their age. Children haven't been exposed to others that may be sick in an enclosed environment like a school in a long time. I don't think any parent wants their child to be the first to test this out.

-Symptoms for COVID are similar to other health conditions and not being sure of your sickness adds anxiety to the situation. This leads to the school community being more susceptible to the virus. Students need to start with remote instruction & use a phased-in approach to in-person instruction when the virus is gone & it's safe to do so.

-Teachers can build initial relationships with their students without wearing a mask & shield online. I can't imagine having an upset student in my classroom & not being able to hug that student because I have to stay 6 feet away.

-If we prepare a robust remote learning program now, then we will be better prepared for the seasonal likelihood of another quarantine.

-Remote learning can be personalized and my colleagues & I can work together to provide interventions needed for students in the intervals that they are needed.

-Somerville did an excellent job last spring providing needed technology to families and this can be done again.

-The educators in the Somerville Public Schools are in love with teaching, care deeply for our own students & families, and it is our position that starting remotely will allow us to get back to the classroom responsibly & safely -

with a death count of ZERO! Thank you for your time.

Kinga Borondy, First Grade Paraprofessional at the Argenziano School

I want to urge the School Committee and the superintendent to forgo any kind of planning for in person or hybrid models. I urge you to just focus on remote learning and make it the best learning absolutely possible to create a new concept for schools in Somerville, one that are outside the traditional box for the classroom. Maybe have teachers working in cross curricular and cross age and grade lines, and that we can address the equity issues and concerns, and address systemic racial bias and inequality. I challenge Mayor Curtatone to wire the whole of City of Somerville for free Internet access for everybody. This is not an unachievable goal. Towns in many communities have done. A town in Spain has free Internet for everybody, all they had to do was open a computer. Nobody had to pay for it. I challenge the school committee to work with educators, all of whom are professionals and have ideas that are creative beyond your imaginations to create something that is outside of the whole regular American School system. The Danes teach outside, they invested in the hand-washing costs. They've been teaching outside since March, this is achievable and it can be done.

Kate Sackton, 20 Wallace Street, Brown School Parent

Children are adaptable. Children have already gotten used to masking and social distancing. And sure, there will be slip ups. No expectation from health experts that people follow social distancing and masking perfectly all the time. is built into the models. These things are keeping people safe, and we have in Massachusetts low infection rate, and we have a seasonal culture. We should take the opportunity when we can incorporate outdoor learning. We can be incorporating open windows, and the chance for our children to get to know their teachers in person. If we can build that relationship for just 3 or 4 weeks, before keeping track of the metrics and public health and the tracing that the Mayor mentioned, and implementing things that will, at the moment that there's any sign of a single infection, we will be aware of these things. We need to take advantage of the good weather and the opportunity to build relationships. My young child cannot be comforted from six feet away by teacher wearing a mask, well you try comforting my child when he's storms out of the room because he doesn't know you, has no relationship with a teacher who's just a face on a screen, is not going to be able to learn completely remotely at such a young age. The most at risk children, the ELL students and special needs students, they need to build these relationships in person. Let's please take advantage of the low infection rate that will make this initial hybrid model safe to begin the school year to build those relationships. We can go remote when we need to. Thank you.

Missy Matteis, 21 Malvern Ave (Submitted her comment to be included in these minutes)

I am a first grade teacher in Somerville. I know and acknowledge how hard this pandemic and virtual learning has been on families and decision makers this past spring. However, the pandemic is still a very large threat to the health of children, their families, and staff. Little is known about the long-term health risks for adults and children. I love teaching, I love my students, and most of all, I love interacting in person with my students. However, the current guidelines are not safe for in person instruction. In my first grade classroom, children work collaboratively for almost all of the day. They share materials, play games, and laugh with one another. The current in person guidelines scare me. These children are used to interacting closely with one another and they require a lot of love and assistance from the adults around them. I am asked to help blow their noses, tie shoes, and open snacks constantly. At morning drop off, I show love by crouching down to be at their level and guiding them into the classroom if they are feeling anxious. During active shooter drills I have to put all of my 25 first graders into our class bathroom. There is no way to keep 6 feet of distance during these tasks and support their social and emotional needs. Furthermore, I am responsible for teaching them how to read in first grade. We share books, I help them point to words, and build words on boards. With the current guidelines, none of my classroom instruction would be safe or effective for myself or my students. Having students sit forward, masked, and at a distance is even not safe due to the airborne nature of this virus. AND there is no testing and tracing plan in place for teachers and students. If the hands-on, loving nature of a classroom is stripped and students cannot socialize AND there is a risk of falling ill I believe it is not worth it to be in person to start the school year. We need to be thinking about more innovative ways to interact with students to provide them with the relationship building they need. Using our city's outdoor spaces could help.

Last, we need to be thinking about the science and the undeniable risk of a second wave. Is there a certain transmission rate the state needs to maintain in order to be in person? At this time, we should be focusing on robust and equitable remote learning now- teachers need the notice to be adaptable and create something that would be valuable to their students who they love. We cannot haphazardly enter the building only to be sent home weeks later with no plan. Student health and teacher health should not be overlooked and I believe the current

guidelines make school NOT safe. I am urging the school committee to start the year remotely. Thank you for listening.

Rebecca Inzana, Ward 5 – 36 Albion Street, First Grade Parent.

I am a health care worker at Mass General Hospital and also an educator. I first want to acknowledge the high emotions that I'm hearing on the part of our faculty on this call and you know, I stand with you and your fear but I also want to acknowledge that myself and my colleagues have people coughing and our faces all day every day at the hospital who have positive COVID tests and we have yet to get sick. PPE, does work, and I think it's important that we remind ourselves of that. I also know that you didn't sign up to be an essential worker, but, we do look to you as more than childcare, you're educating our children. There are significant data globally that children under 10 years old are not transmitting this virus. In fact, there is not one single case around the entire world of a child under 10 transmitting the virus. So when I think about reinstating in person learning for early Elementary education, this is the data that I'm thinking about. And I think we have to realign ourselves and refocus ourselves on the data at hand. I also want to mention that my daughter who is six has been in summertime camp with her friends for several weeks now, wearing masks and it is an absolute non-issue. They have acclimated completely. They're also with counselors who are not allowed to touch them per regulations and yet they still get scrapes. They, bump around and they are incredibly resilient, so don't discredit their ability to adapt. The last thing is that one size should not fit all for students in SPS and with equity at the forefront, we can come up with different models for different families and different needs and please use our community as a resource. We live near Boston. We have many people here in SPS, as parents who are a part of the education and healthcare community, let us help you help us.

Rami Bridge, STA President

Members of School Committee, you are about to engage in an impossible task. You are tasked with finding the best way to re-open schools that make substantive learning possible while ensuring the health, safety, and emotional well-being of all the many adults and children who make up our schools. I've had literally hundreds of conversations with educators in Somerville and across the state the summer. And I can tell you that there are no good answers. The deeper you dive into this question, you will discover what we already know, that all of the options are bad. We believe that the best of these options, to begin the remotely, to ensure the health and safety of our community. The sooner we can make this decision, then the sooner we can go to work, implementing it in the best way possible. Rather than go into all the details of that decision, I want to talk for a second about ventilation. For eight years, I taught at the West Somerville Neighborhood School, one of the newer buildings in the district. For five of those years, I had something rare and invaluable. I had a working thermostat in my classroom, when the temperature was too hot, I could make it colder, when the temperature was too cold, I could make it warmer. For those of you who don't work in public school buildings, you won't understand what it truly rare and remarkable thing this was. Unfortunately, over the summer one year the blower in my classroom broke. When I returned in the fall, it literally slipped on the floor because the entire room was covered in a moist layer of mildew. This was eventually cleaned up. But over the course of the next three years, the HVAC people came no less than 12 times to try and repair my broken blower. Unfortunately, the thermostat has never returned to working condition. I tell you the story tonight to think about the air quality in our schools. The HVAC could not be repaired despite dozens of attempts to fix it. These are the conditions of our buildings that we're discussing returning educators and students into. Before airflows sat somewhere between a funny story and a classroom management problem, a student's napped at 90-degree heat or shivered under a blanket in the classroom when the classroom temperature literally dipped between 50 to 55 degrees. Now, airflow is a question of life and death. This is just one story about one of the seemingly endless concerns associated with in person learning and you've heard a ton of them here tonight. I hope you will agree that the only safe way to begin the year is remotely. Thank you.

Rana McLaughlin, 96 Rogers Ave. Parent

My husband is an essential worker in manufacturing, he's required to work outside of our home daily as with many professions. Remote is not an option for him. And I work for Partners Healthcare Information Systems and thankful to be permitted to work remotely since school closure. I've worked to help lead up telehealth initiatives whose needs have been fueled by COVID but have now thankfully shifted the priority to in person visits given the lower rates of covert in State. Throughout the spring, my stress was through the roof. And my children often work with my nightmares. The anxiety levels and mental health of both children and parents is and was being pushed to its limits, in dual income homes like mine. And so I can't imagine how those less privileged managed through. A few weeks ago, my son was able to return to his preschool full-time, and my daughter began the wonderful summer camp with Somerville Rec at Dilboy. They are so happy and finally back sleeping well. Two days after my son returned to

preschool, he woke up to tell me about the wonderful and very funny dream he had. He had never told me about a happy dream before. There are many daycares in Somerville currently doing an excellent job of providing full-time care to support the needs of working parents and providing opportunities for socialization while adhering to safety guidelines. And so I hope for our youngest students and those with special needs who can't yet, independently navigate a screen or call on a friend. The in person learning is prioritized, with an added option for a fully remote virtual curriculum for those students and families who are medically fragile. And at the very minimum, we need a commitment of when or what threshold will the school system commit to an in person return. Thank you.

Rae Woodcock, Sixth Grade Teacher at ESCS

First, I'd like to request that translation services be worked out and available for these meetings as soon as possible. We have many families in this district who don't speak English, and several of them have communicated with me that they wanted to be a part of this conversation tonight. These families are valuable members of our school community, and should be entitled to participate fully in these discussions. In regard to re-opening, I recognize that no plan during a pandemic will be ideal for mental health, but when reflecting on the potential effects of the different plans, I keep coming back to this situation I was in a couple of years ago, in which a parent of two separate students died very suddenly in the same week. So one of the reasons why this tragedy hit so hard was because it felt like the unthinkable was suddenly possible and my team was very worried, this news would start a mass panic of fear to the other kids about losing a parent. We wanted at the time to make sure they knew such a tragedy was rare. I support starting the year remote. HVAC systems are not designed like hospitals. If we return before the virus is under control and before our building's HVAC systems have been carefully evaluated and updated, the unthinkable will become inevitable and we won't be able to re-assure students that it's unlikely that tragedy could strike at any moment. Not only is this fear not conducive to learning, but I know I will not be the same person after all of this if I have to watch any one of my colleagues, loved ones, students or their families get sick and die, especially knowing that we could have prevented this. Thank you.

Jeremy Brown, 234 Summer Street, Third Grade Parent

Public schools are one of the few true social safety nets in our country. Teachers give every student a chance to succeed in life. Schools give scared students a safe place to be. Schools give food to hungry students, and schools give working parents a few hours to cover every day. There are real dangers to weakening the safety net. Kids will fall through the cracks. Parents, especially women, will fall out of the workforce, and they never come back. And privileged families will flee the public schools. On a personal note, our four-year-old daughter is doing great in a private preschool. Teachers and students had to adapt, but the kids do masks great. There is real learning going on, and the day is not dominated by the hygiene management. This year, public pre-K is not looking like a good option. Now, there are also risks to re-opening the schools. But we had a lot of data now we didn't have in March, we have good data that under 10, seldom transmit, coded, even within their own households. And we have good data that we can prevent transmission with distancing unmasked in every age group. We also know remote learning as a pale shadow of in person learning. I'm not just talking about winging it in the spring under chaotic conditions. Many of you probably know, universities have been struggling for over a decade to figure out remote learning with online courses, and they are still a weak substitute for rapport of physical presence. Our public schools are every bit as essential as our grocery stores, trash collection, and the fire department. Not to mention medical. We would notice the consequences of trash piling up right away, but while the consequences of missing public school won't be as obvious in the short term, they will ultimately be felt for a generation or more. We should support teachers and staff as essential personnel, including ensuring their childcare and their safety. We owe to everyone in the community to physically reopen the schools for as many students as possible. We can use the data, design strategies for different student age groups and teacher risk profiles. We design a staged re-opening, prioritizing the most at risk kids, and clearly communicating the stage plans for parents and teachers. Thank you

Lis Stark, SPS Educator (Submitted her comment to be included in these minutes)

Thank you for allowing me to speak briefly about two **time issues** that are particular to SCALE school.

I am a full-time ELL teacher at SCALE.

1. In order to overcome some of the major obstacles to remote learning that we teachers and students endured March-May, it feels essential that SCALE **delay the students' start date so that educators have time to:**
 - Adjust lives to new types of teaching schedules
 - Design lessons for different (new) models of teaching
 - Learn how to use the technology that's being put in place now for students to use

- Learn what students are learning this summer
- Send/deliver necessary texts to students' homes
- Collaborate with Dept. PA and counselors how to promote student long-term engagement with learning

2. While 3-hour, in-person classes worked for ELL teachers and students, it feels essential to **significantly shorten the duration of individual, online ELL classes.**

- Lower level ELLs need mostly synchronous class time (learning together) to access the learning content/objectives/resources.
- As adults and often, parents, our students must juggle more disruptions when attending classes at home.
- Experience has taught me that students focus best when remote classes are reduced to 1.5 or 2 hours max (full-length movie duration)
- While reducing the duration of class hours, teachers and students do need built-in weekly time slots for teachers to hold office hours.

Barbara Halpenny, 7 Lexington Street, Capuano School Parent

I am hoping that my child will have some experience of kindergarten in the fall. Thank you for hosting this meeting, it has been very educational. This is a very complex situation and it sounds like most of the teachers are terrified of going back to school, and I'm wondering if you can consider any degree of, letting teachers who are more interested in being in person with kids do that. And those who are really concerned, maybe do some of the more remote stuff. Our experience with remote learning was worse than nothing, in a way. It was hard to try to make it work, and so I'm also wondering if you can communicate to families, what the options would be if we wanted to kind of opt out of doing it, or, what we're allowed to do. I'm a single parent, it was really hard to be working full-time and trying to help my child. She is doing a summer camp right now, where other kids are doing great with masks and sanitizers and distancing, and she loves her camp teacher. She made card for them this weekend to take in Monday morning, I don't think that the masks in any way have seemingly stop their bonding and she is definitely learning things. So I hope something can be done this fall, at least for the young kids. Thank you very much.

Gloria Salazar, Teacher at the Winter Hill School

Mayor Curtatone, Superintendent Skipper and members of the School Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak. I want to begin by telling you, I miss my students, I cannot wait to be back in school with them. But I am concerned. I am concerned about re-opening school in a hybrid model. I am 55 years old and I have the heart condition. I am what is considered high risk, I also live with two people who are high risk. I want to express how sad I was when they got the communication from Human Resources, asking me if I had health concerns and suggesting that I consider taking a year of FMLA, without pay. I wish I could, I depend on my salary, I need my job, but I am also scared. I am scared that going back to work may mean losing my life. It seems very selfish, but I believe that being present in our buildings, even for hybrid model, would really risk me, my students and their families. I also feel that the better we plan for a completely remote model, the more prepared we will be to do an appropriate job when we re-open schools. There are many successes that happened during this spring. And I want to say in response to what Superintendent Skipper was saying, I work with newcomers. My students are the newest arrivals to the country. I work with the middle school, and I was able to cover my curriculum during the spring. I actually got further because I was able to have more flexibility with my time and less interruptions and surprisingly my kids were highly engaged.

Megan Brady, Vice President of the STA

Tonight, I want to tell you about my mom. She was a paraprofessional, and a seventh and eighth grade Paraprofessional for decades, and go figure. And now I also teach seventh and eighth grade. My mom taught me compassion, patience, and empathy. She taught me how to reset every day and start fresh. In short, I'm a better teacher for my students because of the values and lessons I learned from my mom. My mom's actually with me at this moment. I'm moving tomorrow and my mom is literally packing up my apartment right now so that I can attend this meeting. She's amazing, and I'm lucky to have her. And my mom is also my reason for why I want to start the year teaching remotely. Under a hybrid or in person model, I will not be able to visit her every weekend for dinner like I normally do. And that thought is killing me inside. You've heard from my colleagues about why hybrid or in person is neither safe nor feasible. Classrooms will not look like what we're accustomed to. Class activities will not run how we're accustomed. Even if students are less likely to transmit the virus between each other, there will still be dozens, if not, more, educators, in the buildings every day. And those educators have families, and loved ones whose health we are responsible for. When we said earlier that we could move fluidly between the models as necessary, it's hard not to see that that acknowledging that the virus is still the threat and that people can get sick.

And that's not something I'm willing to accept. We tell students that are stressed brain cannot learn, well a stressed brain also cannot teach. Let's invest time and resources over the next month to make remote learning better.

Sara Marx, 11 Boden Street, First Grade Parent.

My family will be choosing the 100% remote option no matter what is decided and what is offered. The hybrid model is a lot of exposure for not a lot of benefit. Of course, I worry about my child missing out on her in person, first grade experience. But at this point, I'm honestly more worried about the trauma of her attending school with masks, with social distancing and her teacher needing to spend so much of their time as a covert safety monitor, everything that Ms. Young and other teachers described tonight. I don't think enough is being talked about the social emotional effects of school, opening in person in these conditions. No one tonight who spoke so well is saying that remote learning is an adequate substitute for in person learning. And yet I urge you to decide on a remote start now, so that everybody in the system can focus on making remote learning work for every child and family in the city. As a resident of a longtime who's made there forever home here, I'm really looking to the City for Innovation and Remote Learning. That's the type of leadership that I would like to see from Somerville, as well as innovation and creative solutions around childcare, and finding ways for kids who need to learn in person to be able to do so safely. To innovate around food and technology access, et cetera. So please, please decide on remote learning now, so that we can move forward with a plan that works for everybody, and takes into account what went well, and what didn't go as well as it could last spring. Thank you so much.

Lori Segall, 20 Cherry Street, SCALE Teacher.

I have taught at SCALE for seven years. Our situation is different than the K through 12 schools. First, our classrooms are in the basement of the tab building on Holland Street. The rooms have very poor ventilation and none with operable windows. Many of our students are frontline workers, their home health aides, supermarket workers, construction workers and house cleaners. Some of them are immunocompromised and would be afraid to enter the building with other folks that are frontline workers. Third, half of our teachers are over 55, most over 60. And fourth, we teach language and in my case, I emphasized pronunciation very much, if I needed to wear a mask, my students wouldn't be able to see how I'm pronouncing words, which I try to do very clearly, so that they can see how to move the mouth and be able to pronounce words better. And, for me, when the students who are wearing masks some much harder to understand. So, many of the staff that I've spoken with have wanted to proceed with remote learning. But none of us have been trained on how to teach in this way. We kind of muddled our way through in the spring, but we really need some serious training on how to do this better. Thank you.

Rozanne Puleo, 6 Dartmouth Street, First Grade Parent at ESCS

I am a nurse practitioner at Lynn Community Health Center and during the pandemic I've been working in the COVID Suspect Unit, where every patient was suspected to have COVID. The vast majority of them were a diagnosed with COVID, particularly at the height of the pandemic. I'm not going to comment actually on whether or not we should return to school, because I feel like the speakers that we've had thus far have very eloquently, and passionately stated their viewpoints. And, quite frankly, I'm very torn, but one of the things I do want to comment on and one of the things that I would like to hear spoken about at some point or a plan around is what happens within the school if we are to return in person at some capacity. What is the healthcare like in our school? I do know that the high school has a school based health center staffed by a nurse practitioner, but from my understanding, every other elementary school has just one nurse. And what happens to that nurse if they have one student than, two students than, three students, particularly at the height of the flu season. In my practice, when I'm seeing a patient, I see my patient, the patient then leaves, and then the room has to rest for 15 minutes. And I have the luxury of having multiple rooms to see my patients in, but that's not necessarily the case in the schools. And so I would just like to hear a little bit more around the plans for our schools, what our school nurses are going to have to deal with. Are we going to get more staff? Are they going to have more space? Because I think that's also a very important piece of controlling the pandemic and keeping our students and staff safe. Thank you.

That concluded Public Comment. Chair Normand thanked all the speakers for attending tonight's meeting and sharing their remarks. She announced that another Regular meeting is scheduled for the following week as well as several Town halls coming up and members of the public are encouraged to attend.

IV. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT

A. School Reopening Plan

This was covered during the Superintendent's initial remarks.

V. NEW BUSINESS

B. 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	Somerville Education Foundation	Somerville, MA	\$35,000	SPS STAR Data Analyst via Biogen Grant

MOTION: There was a motion by Ms. Pitone, seconded by Dr. Ackman, to accept this donation with gratitude. The motion was approved via roll call vote.

VI. ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS

Ms. Pitone

Ms. Pitone took this time to ask if there is any information that could be shared share about the extended timeline, to get an idea of when we might be able to share more with parents, as well as, in particular, about surveillance testing.

Superintendent Skipper responded that we are in a situation where information will develop Daily. For instance, there was notification today that DESE is going to grant flexibility over the 180-day calendar and grant districts some leverage in terms of days. Information comes quickly and changes rapidly. Some of the information relative to the surveillance testing that the Mayor spoke about in trying to get a system in place, the city is working hard on that, but it is a slow process. As soon as there is information she and the Mayor have both made a commitment to share it with the community.

Mayor Curtatone added that the City is working with partners at the Cambridge Health Alliance to develop a surveillance testing plan and in terms of the research itself, he hopes to have something to present to the school committee by the end of the week.

VII. CONDOLENCES

The Somerville School Committee extends its deepest condolences to the families of **Patrick Murphy**, Father of Trish Murphy-Sheehy, Teacher at SHS. And **Joan O'Meara**, Mother to Maureen Robichaux, NW/FC Teacher and Wife of retired Principal Fred O'Meara.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting was adjourned via voice vote at 8:52 p.m.

Related documents:

- Agenda
- Submitted Comments for Public comment

Submitted by: K. Santiago

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE GoToWEBINAR
REGULAR MEETING – JULY 27, 2020 – 7:00 P.M.**

Pursuant to Governor Baker’s March 12, 2020 Order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. C. 30A, s. 18, and the Governor’s March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, as well as Mayor Curtatone’s Declaration of Emergency, dated March 15, 2020, this meeting of the Somerville School Committee will be conducted via remote participation. We will post an audio recording, audio-video recording, transcript, or other comprehensive record of these proceedings as soon as possible after the meeting on the City of Somerville website and local cable access government channels (SCAT).

Copy & paste the following link into your internet browser to preregister or on the date and time of this meeting to view it live: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/3723705443128534543>

Somerville Public Schools - School Committee Goals 2019 - 2022

Through the following long-range goals, we commit to addressing deep-rooted systemic barriers that have prevented us from achieving our district vision of equity and excellence and ensuring that all students, regardless of race or ethnicity, have the supports and resources they need to achieve educational success in our district now and in the future. By 2022, we will ...:

...increase the percentage of support staff of color by 6 percentage points, teachers and counselors of color by 5 percentage points, and administrators of color by 4 percentage points through evaluating and strengthening all elements of our human capital system.

... 1) conduct a district enrollment study to understand the prospective future population of the district and 2) craft a vision for school assignment and programming aligned with the district’s equity policy.

... design, evaluate, and partially or fully implement student-based budgeting to ensure that every student has equitable access to rich learning opportunities that help them thrive.

... design a robust system of aligned developmental academic and social-emotional benchmarks which will be used to inform practices, policies, and resource allocation.

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. PUBLIC COMMENT

III. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT

A. School Reopening Update

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Approval of Reopening Grants

B. 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	Somerville Education Foundation	Somerville, MA	\$35,000	SPS STAR Data Analyst via Biogen Grant

V. ITEMS FROM BOARD

MEMBERS VI. CONDOLENCES

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Comments Submitted for Public Comment by Community Members Who Did Not Attend the Regular School Committee Meeting July 27, 2020

(to be included in the meeting minutes)

Tim Sackton, Parent to 1st/5th graders at the Brown School

I am a parent of two kids at the Brown school, who will be entering first and fifth grade in the fall. I am increasingly concerned with the state of planning for the fall school year, and I would like to register a comment.

First, I would like to state that we are faced with the need to pick one of a number of terrible options. There is no way to avoid that -- there is no good choice for the next school year. With cases flat or slightly increasing in Massachusetts, and staying around 30-40 new cases per day per million, a full return to school seems impossible right now (I believe that many European countries and Asian countries that have had a full return to school successfully have fewer than 10 new cases per day per million, in some cases fewer than 1 new case per million per day).

That said, I strongly believe that some kind of hybrid model has huge benefits compared to a fully remote option, with relatively few increased risks. We now know a lot about how to reduce the risks of spreading COVID: wearing masks, especially indoors; keeping group sizes small; a reasonable amount of physical distancing, especially when masks cannot be worn; spending as much time outdoors as possible. We also know that, although children of course can get COVID, and spread it, growing evidence suggests that they do so at a lower rate than adults (especially children under 10; the data on children over 10 is equivocal but points towards more adult-like transmission, although they still perhaps are less likely to be infected). All of these safety measures can be implemented in a hybrid model.

And let's consider the benefits of a hybrid model over a fully remote option. For mental health reasons, kids absolutely need to see their friends; for many kids this is a desperate need that must be met. I am sure I am not the only parent whose children are absolutely desperate for some in person social contact with anyone other than their siblings. Yes, social interactions will be different with COVID safety measures, but having seen how happy my son is just hanging out and chatting with his friend, outside, 6 feet apart, and masked, I think it is easy to overstate how big a deal the differences are. Kids can adapt to the new realities, but they *need to see their friends.*

For pedagogical reasons, having some in person connection to their teachers seems absolutely critical to effective remote learning. Honestly, even school is only open for 3-4 weeks before we have to go back to a fully remote option because cases start climbing, I believe the pedagogical gains would be enormous, especially for younger grades where remote learning is only barely viable to begin with. My 1st grader is not going to build a connection with a face on a screen; he barely talks to his grandparents on FaceTime and he has known and loved them his whole life. Emergency remote learning last spring was barely functional for my then-kindergartener, but the whole thing that held it together was his pre-existing relationship with his teacher. The idea that he is going to sign on to a Zoom meeting and sit patiently and listen to a stranger is, I think, totally unrealistic, without essentially full time parental supervision.

Which brings us to logistical reasons. Remote learning varies wildly in effectiveness, depending on the age of the child, their temperament, the ability of parents to provide supervision and support, the technological resources of the family, the temperament of the parents, and many other factors. School is an equalizing force; remote learning is the opposite. A hybrid learning model at least provides some in person opportunity to equalize learning experiences, focus on needs and mental health, and at least

provide a floor for kids who are not able to learn much remotely. This is to say nothing of the families of kids where the parents have full time jobs, which raises a whole host of other issues and impossibilities.

I understand hybrid models have their own logistical challenges -- arranging schedules so that siblings are coordinated and everything works is a challenge; figuring out how to manage remote + online at the same time is a challenge; figuring out the realistic ways to manage safety are a challenge. But so do fully remote options. Like I said, there are no good options.

More than the choice between hybrid or remote, I am disappointed with the lack of creative thinking on the part of Somerville Public Schools. For example, we know that younger kids have much more difficulty with remote learning; fully online kindergarten seems like an exercise in futility, for example. Cambridge Public Schools are looking at a plan that brings all K-2 (approx) students back full time, and makes space for this in school buildings by having older kids fully remote. Has there been any consideration of this option? In many places, outdoor classrooms have also been proposed, that would allow more kids to be educated at reduced risk. Are we looking at that as an option, say for the start of school at least, perhaps until mid-October (at which point either things will hopefully be getting better, and more kids can move inside, or getting worse and we'll need to move more remote anyway). Why aren't we considering finding additional space to use for schools? There isn't going to be a good option, but with some creativity we can make less bad options. Of course this would take work, and money, and time, and all of these are in short supply. Delaying the start of school by a couple of weeks to allow more time to arrange for these kinds of options would be worth considering. If these options have been considered, and rejected, some information on why they seem to work in other communities but cannot work in Somerville would be extremely useful for parents -- in general communication has been terrible from the school district, with very little information about what is being considered released via public channels.

I would also like to see consideration of more creative possibilities. For example, I would seriously consider 'unschooling' my younger child for a year if SPS goes fully remote, because there is really no way he is going to get anything out of a remote curriculum in 1st grade, unless there are radical changes from what happened in the spring. But could I do that, and still be guaranteed a place at the Brown school in 2nd grade? I love the Brown school community and have no interest in dropping out of the public school system, but I also have no interest in having daily fights with my children about signing on for class. Some kind of option that basically says: here is the material, do what you will with it, see you next year would potentially avoid a lot of stress and fights and problematic behavior.

Or: has there been any serious consideration of extensive surveillance testing in the school population? Pooled saliva testing, even with a relatively high false negative rate, could make a big difference. Tufts is banking on this as a way to control COVID in their on-campus population; many other universities seem to be heading this way. What are the barriers to considering this for Somerville Schools?

Finally, and I hope this goes without saying: if the school district does decide on a fully remote option, or even a hybrid option, more effort has to be put into making the online options engaging, effective, and useful. Last spring even within the Brown school there was a huge range of what was on offer, with little standardization even within grades, and very little material in some cases. This was an emergency situation, and everyone was doing the best they could in difficult circumstances. I have heard lots of times that "the fall will be better," but no one has articulated what that means.

I know this comment is long and I will end here. I hope that going forward information and communication will be better. Even if some more creative / unusual options are not possible, an

explanation of *why* they are not possible will go a long way towards acceptance and buy in for the ultimate decisions. Thank you.

Corinna Beale

As two full-time working parents, we are unable to physically bring our child to work with us as this is not a safe environment for a 6 year old. We depend on the public school system to provide the physical care/over-site of our child while we are physically at work. If the school cannot provide this due to a remote or hybrid education program, how will they provide care and safety for our children (and the many other children in the same position) so we can go to work and keep our jobs? Hiring a full time private care-taker is not within our means and we do not consider it a viable option to ask our parents (their grand-parents) to watch our children.

Mike Sackton, 69 Lowden Ave #1, Somerville MA

I am the parent of a rising 3rd grader at the Brown school. The challenges around reopening school seem incredibly difficult and I'm sure everyone has the best interests of the whole community at heart as we struggle through this. The current situation is obviously quite complex and constantly changing, and an immediate full reopening of all schools is obviously quite difficult and may well be out of reach.

Distance learning did not work at all for my son and my family. He struggled to maintain any kind of motivation and neither my wife nor myself were equipped to teach him in a way that didn't lead to tears. My wife is a pediatrician, and beyond just our personal situation, she has shared a lot of research and articles with me about the long term damage lack of schooling does to the social, emotional, and academic development of children, especially younger children. I am very worried about what a 8 month, 12 month, or even longer 'pause' in in-person instruction will do to my son and our school community.

Some of the online articles I've seen, such as the column published in on Wicked Local Somerville by the president of the Somerville Teacher's Association (<https://somerville.wickedlocal.com/news/20200721/column-somerville-educators-call-for-remote-instruction-as-only-safe-return>), give an impression that the focus of the ongoing discussion is about why it isn't safe to have kids in school. I want us to be talking about how to make it safe for as many kids as possible, and what parents, teachers, administrators, and the wider community can do to make some form of in-person learning a reality in the fall and, assuming community transition stays low, a way toward fully reopening in the winter or spring.

Emily Lacika, Ward 6 resident, Kennedy School parent.

I would like to voice my concerns over a remote-only return to school in the fall. The School Committee and Superintendent Skipper have made their commitment to district equity clear. Our students and families come from many different socioeconomic backgrounds. I struggle to see a how remote-only model can address the widening gaps between students. Even if, as the MTA report proposed, the remote-only period is phased out after 6 to 8 weeks, that would still represent 17 to 22% of the new school year, a period of time in which achievement gaps can continue to grow.

In my household, there are more devices than people. I have a graduate degree in education, and my husband has a PhD in computer science. Yet our family still struggled with remote learning last school year. If our child, who had more than a school-provided Chromebook and high-speed internet connection, had problems during those 13 weeks — 36% of the school year — then I am very concerned about the students who did not have these in-home advantages.

I would like all the stakeholders in Somerville Public Schools to consider how remote-only instruction could be detrimental to our district's commitment to equity.

Ann Peralta

I am mainly hoping to share the fact that I would like the school committee to ensure they are not solely focused on one solution for all but that you are concentrating on equity and considering differences for kindergarten vs. high school. For example, is it reasonable for kindergarteners to successfully engage in remote learning? I have heard that Cambridge and Arlington are both considering taking a differential approach - both based on differences in how different aged children spread covid-19 and how different aged children learn effectively with remote instruction. My daughter who will be a kindergartener this coming year refused to engage in any of the remote offerings her preschool offered. Attached is an example of what different policies look like with equity and relative learning ability and relative risk in mind. I believe this would allow us to more creatively consider all of the spaces available to us in Somerville to prioritize students who need in-person learning the most.

Joe Sousa, 75 Columbus Avenue

Thank you in advance for your kind attendance to this note. I am a parent of a 4- and 6- year old. As an audio-only attendee to this meeting, I'm struck and disappointed that more parents are not being heard. It feels as if educators are the overwhelming majority of voices being heard. What I'm hearing from these educator voices is considerable fear and extremely high emotions. This is understandable, and much of the commentary is heart wrenching. However, I feel like this fear risks clouding how we as a community are thinking about schools. **My contention is that the risks of keeping schools closed far outweigh the benefits.**

A few points:

-First, **keeping kids out of school does necessarily 'keep them safe.'** There are clear indicators that domestic abuse and malnutrition are spiking across the nation, including in our community. I hear commentary that 'if one life is lost, it's not worth it.' Let's flip that. If the life of one somerville child is lost due to an abusive situation that would have been discovered if school was in session, would it still be worth it?

-Second, for many parents **the child care role of school is indispensable.** "Remote" school requires full time child care. The well off will simply hire someone. Dual-income households will go down one income. And many will be forced to choose between going without income or leaving their children unattended. I feel this point is not at all well appreciated in this meeting.

-Third, affluent parents may very well abandon this city for communities that do open school. The progress that Somerville has been making over the last decade risks being arrested, and perhaps even backsliding.

-Finally, there are models that work. The Somerville YMCA has been conducting a daily camp with full PPE. Schools in Europe have been adopting a variety of new practices--including doing as much outdoors. I am disappointed there's not more discussion here on how to implement PPE, how to utilize outdoor spaces, HVAC adjustments being planned to infrastructure, and other positive steps.

I realize many of my comments were already made by many of the eloquent speakers. But in an effort to better represent the voices of people who feel that there are far far higher costs and real risks to keeping schools closed than there are in finding a smart, measured way to reopen schools in the fall.

I hope these comments are well received.

Dana Sackton, 69 Lowden Ave

A few months ago, my 2nd grader came into my room in the morning and announced, "I had a bad dream last night, Mommy. I dreamt that you got an email that they were cancelling 3rd grade too." I have been struggling with what I wanted to write to share my opinion about school planning for next year and when I remembered this moment and could not wait any longer.

In addition to being a Somerville parent, I am also a pediatrician. My family's experience with "virtual school" was horrible. While my son was receiving work to do, he was not being taught anything. My husband has been working from home, but this has not meant that he is able to take charge of helping with school. He has a busy job that he has to do during regular hours, and while he tried to make time to at least have lunch with our son, for the most part, my 8 yo was left to his own (mostly electronic) devices. For a while, I was home doing telehealth part of the week-these were the good days, when I could pop out for a minute between patients to make sure my son was actually trying to stick to the schedule we made.

Every day at work, I hear about the same experiences from parents. Their children aren't learning anything. They hate virtual learning, they can't get anything done, they are struggling with anxiety and depression. My family is lucky. My son has no special needs. Children with IEPs are not having their learning needs met. They are falling farther behind their peers. Parents are not equipped to be regular teachers, so they are definitely not able to be special education teachers.

I sympathize with the fear that teachers are feeling. Early in the pandemic, I was terrified about the possibility of getting sick. We were being bombarded with news about doctors getting sick and dying of COVID. It was hard to sleep at night. I now feel comfortable that I know how to decrease my risk even though I am getting close to my patients on a regular basis. Wearing masks and eye protection and frequent hand washing really does make a difference. The kids over 2 years old who come to my office have to wear masks, and the vast majority of them, even the youngest, do just fine keeping them on for the entire visit. I believe the expectation for schools should be that all teachers and all students wear masks as much as possible. Even most Kindergarteners should be able to do this.

Over the past several weeks, many of my patients have returned to daycare. So far, the reports that I am getting back from families are all positive. Most significantly, many children who were struggling are now flourishing.

I feel very strongly that our goal needs to be getting children back into school in the fall. I believe that we are harming children by not providing quality education. We will be seeing the consequences of this for years to come. Obviously if cases begin to rise again, in person learning may not be possible, though I am frustrated that so many non-essential businesses are reopening. I wish we could have made reopening school the priority and only opened so many other businesses once that happened successfully.