

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**Monday, February 25, 2019 – Regular Meeting**

7:00 p.m. - Board of Aldermen Chambers - City Hall

**Members present:** Mr. Futrell, Ms. Palmer, Dr. Ackman, Ms. Normand, Mr. Green, Ms. O'Sullivan, Ms. Pitone, and President Ballantyne.

**Members absent:** Mayor Curtatone (8:05 p.m.).

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Normand called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. with a moment of silence followed by a salute to the flag of the United States of America.

Chair Normand asked Superintendent Skipper to call the roll, results of which were as follows: PRESENT – 8 – Mr. Futrell, Ms. Pitone, Ms. O'Sullivan, Dr. Ackman, Ms. Palmer, Ms. Normand, Alderman Ballantyne and Mr. Green. ABSENT – 1 – Mayor Curtatone (8:05 p.m.).

**II. REPORT OF STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES**

The Somerville High School student representatives were not present this evening.

**III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- JANUARY 14, 2019
- JANUARY 28, 2019

MOTION: Motion by Mr. Green to approve minutes from January 14, 2019, seconded by Dr. Ackman. Motion approved via voice vote.

January 28, 2019 minutes are tabled until next meeting.

**IV. PUBLIC COMMENT**

- Rami Bridges commented regarding the recently revised Homework Policy. Mr. Bridges has been teaching in Somerville for 7 years. There are a number of teachers here who do not live in Somerville, and who therefore cannot speak tonight. Mr. Bridges asked that all teacher letters be added to the meeting minutes. He said that the new Homework Policy does not treat teachers as professionals. Mr. Bridges said that one survey of teachers is not truly relying on teacher professionalism, and releasing the policy mid-year does not appreciate the expertise of teachers. Mr. Bridges said that parents have ever only complained that he does not give enough homework. We must look deeply at homework as part of a broader picture. He asked for a delay on implementation so teachers can have time to adjust practice.
- Sharyn Lamer has been teaching in Somerville for over 10 years and has two students who attend Somerville Public Schools. As a teacher, Ms. Lamar said she does not assign a lot of homework. But with this policy, she would have to cut that amount in half. Half of the time would be having students read. Transition from 8th to 9th grade does not seem very wisely thought out, going from 2 hours of homework per week to 2 hours per day does not seem very wise. Ms. Lamar said she felt that teachers assign a reasonable amount of homework currently. She said: I take responsibility for preparing students very seriously. I have high expectations of my students, and believe School Committee should as well. Please consider revising this policy.
- Matt Birch is a 6th grade teacher at Kennedy School. The primary concerns about the new Homework Policy are the roll out and communication of the policy. The new Homework Policy was posted and shared on social media by School Committee members before teachers knew about the policy change — this blindsided the teachers. It also privileged a few parents. To immediately implement a major policy initiative disrupts what teachers have already planned. Two important steps did not occur: public comment before full implementation and delayed implementation for teachers to consider the impact.
- Andrea Sachdeva then gave comment on the Powderhouse Studios proposal. She is a local parent, education researcher, and youth advocate. She came to voice support for the school proposal. Project-based learning and agency are core to what Powderhouse hopes to do. As a new parent, Ms. Sachdeva said she was excited for her son to have an experience like that which Powderhouse would provide. She also appreciates the professional development elements that the Powderhouse team has designed into their model.
- Julian Chetty is a 5th grade student at East Somerville Community Schools (ESCS) came to talk about cafeteria recycling and composting. It's unacceptable that we are not recycling and composting in our school cafeteria at ESCS. Our school and students produce a lot of trash. The cafeteria uses lots of single-use plastics and there is lots of food waste produced by students. Julian said he is also in support of Powderhouse Studios; and loves the project-based learning of Citizen Schools.
- Sophia Nelson is a 5th grader at ESCS. Our teachers have done a good job letting us know we should recycle and compost because of global warming. Places where we see teachers, we don't have recycling and composting. Little things add up in good and bad ways.

- Maya Grandoit is a 5th grader at ESCS. We need recycling and compost bins in our classrooms and cafeteria. Fish eat micro plastics and micro plastics are killing fish and coral. We waste a lot of food — and this food should be donated to disadvantaged people.
- Daniel Giordina would like to make a statement of support for Powderhouse Studios proposal. There has been great outreach effort in my neighborhood. She works with Oxfam, an international non-profit Organization that fights poverty and injustice in the world. Powderhouse Studios approach is an interdisciplinary approach. I appreciate the ability to apply regardless of ability to pay or be able to speak a language. I appreciate School Committee members paying attention to the budget issues of the school. This would be a good school in keeping with Mayor Curtatone's flagship initiatives.
- Mark Whittles is a software developer in Cambridge. At his work, students shadow from inception to completion of a project. This is why Mr. Whittles is excited about the Powderhouse Studios proposal. Lots of computer science people are self-taught. I can't overstate how much Powderhouse kids will be advantaged.

Chair Normand announced the conclusion of public comment. We will take a five-minute recess, but before we do, Ms. Normand said she wanted to say a few things about the Homework Policy. There have been some School Committee policies members have not followed. We will be taking this policy up again after March 18th.

Ms. Pitone asked if the policy is in effect between now and the March 18<sup>th</sup>.

Superintendent Skipper responded by saying that the school administration wants to have a conversation with principals first before making a determination. The policy should be in abeyance until they talk with principals. There seems to be a fractured understanding, at best, on how the policy should be followed. We trust our teachers as professionals.

Mr. Green commented that policies only take effect after they have been communicated with stakeholders.

Ms. Pitone suggested that maybe her colleagues should communicate to stakeholders that the policy has not yet been implemented.

Superintendent Skipper strongly suggests we continue with the policy we had until we can have more field feedback.

Mr. Futrell asked the district to communicate to staff that the homework policy has been passed, but not yet properly communicated. Superintendent Skipper said we will see the principals on Wednesday. Mr. Futrell suggests that we say something concrete about this to teachers.

Ms. O'Sullivan added that thinking about communicating to parents about this, the most effective way would be for communication to go out from the district to parents and staff about where we are in the process.

Superintendent Skipper replied that after meeting with the principals, we will get some feedback and send something out to parents and field.

Ms. Normand announced that she will be scheduling a refresher course of policies and procedures with MASC for School Committee members. The meeting then adjured for five minutes.

The meeting reconvened at 7:39 p.m.

## **V. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT**

### **A. District Report**

Superintendent skipper read her district report.

Congratulations to **Dr. Darius Green**, Assistant Principal of the Broadway House at Somerville High School, for being selected as one of six "**Students at the Center Distinguished Fellows**" by the Student-Centered Learning Research Collaborative. Dr. Green is part of the second cohort of Distinguished Fellows, who were selected because of their vision, contributions, and impact in student-centered learning. During their 2-year term (2018-2020), Distinguished Fellows will be working with research teams and youth researchers to bridge research, practice, and policy as it related to student-centered learning. Congratulations, and thank you to Dr. Green for his commitment to Somerville youth, and his leadership in impacting youth across the region.

We were recently awarded a **Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI) grant** by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care. We were one of only 6 Massachusetts communities to

receive this funding award to support preschool programs, working with local partner centers, with a focus on access and equity. (*Other awardees were New Bedford, North Adams, Springfield, Lowell, and Boston*). The first funding cycle is through June of 2019 with the possibility of continuing funding for the next 2 years. Somerville was awarded nearly \$284,000 for the first cycle and could receive continuing funding of nearly \$600,000/year for the next 2 years. We look forward to working with EEC and our center partners on laying a strong foundation for children across Somerville, and continuing our work toward Universal Kindergarten Readiness through a mixed delivery system.

**Parent-Teacher Conferences** continue this week through mid-March.

- Argenziano Conferences are scheduled for Wednesday, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2:45-4:15pm
- Brown School Conferences are scheduled for Thursday, February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2:45-5:00pm
- Capuano Conferences are also scheduled for Thursday, February 28<sup>th</sup>, 3:00-4:30pm and 5:30-6:30pm
- West Somerville Neighborhood School Conferences will be held Thursday, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 4:00-6:30pm

The Somerville Family Learning Collaborative and SomerPromise host the **2019 Summer Camp and Activities Fair** a week from tomorrow, Tuesday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, from 5:30 to 7:00pm at the East Somerville Community School. More than 40 organizations will be on hand to share information about camps and other programs they offer throughout the summer. This is a FREE family event. We encourage all Somerville families to stop by and learn about the many great programs available this summer for youth in our community.

We also invite you to SAVE THE DATE for the annual **Somerville High School Career and Technical Education (CTE) Fair!** This year's event will take place on Saturday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, from 9:00am to 1:00pm at the Somerville High School Atrium. We encourage families to stop by to learn about the many CTE programs we offer, and to get an opportunity to participate in some hands-on activities. CTE Student Ambassadors will be available to take you on a tour of all the programs and shops, and answer any questions you may have about any of our programs.

Ms. Normand asked for an update on the crane at Somerville High School.

Superintendent Skipper noted the crane will be there for this week. Communication has been sent to all parents and guardians. A policy present is on site.

Mr. Futrell commented that for the last few years, we have received feedback from parent teacher conferences, about scheduling more time for parents.

Superintendent Skipper said that in the new contract they've carved out more hours for parent teacher conferences.

- Powderhouse Studios Presentation

Ms. Normand asked for an update of feedback on Powderhouse Studios around the horseshoe.

Ms. Palmer had two office hour events focused on Powderhouse Studios. She said that constituents raised questions about whether we need a new school in our district and whether we can afford one.

Mr. Futrell held two sessions of office hours. He shared that he had three constituents attend office hours. Folks who showed up were positive on the idea of Powderhouse Studios based on PBL and flexible schedule. Since office hours, we have received a more detailed budget from the applicant. Still more discussion needs to happen about budget and impact on the district. Other folks brought up concerns about enrollment.

Mr. Green had two office hour meetings with residents. 13 attendees total; 3 of whom asked about Powderhouse. One gave qualified support if the school doesn't distract from other district schools or programs. One opposed based on lack of an inclusion plan.

Ms. O'Sullivan had two office hour events. Primary questions were about representation of student enrollment. What would happen if it weren't possible to fill all seats? What would the school cost and what would the impact on other schools be? There were some questions about the lease. A homeschool student from another city reported that he liked the idea of Powderhouse Studios.

Ms. Pitone had three office hours, with 24 parents total attending. Ms. Pitone said she was communicating more with parents about the proposal, than they were giving their opinions. A lot of parents thought this was a done

deal. One parent would love to see more of the innovation from Powderhouse Studios be available at all schools. There were some concerns about how challenging it would be to recruit students from immigrant communities. There was also worry about creating a public private school for families who already have school choice options. One constituent communicated that project-based learning is hard to do effectively. I also talked to a very strong advocate who feels that Powderhouse is an opportunity for the district to innovate; there is a hardworking team behind this school. A very involved teacher at the Kennedy did not know anything about this. This will be a difficult decision. I'm still learning and want to learn as much as possible. Ms. Pitone thanked community members for their input.

Dr. Ackman had two sets of office hours. One of my constituents wanted to express extreme displeasure for lack of translated materials. There were questions about the lottery and transportation for students who can't transport themselves. There was curiosity about funding after the XQ grant expires. And some were surprised that this hasn't happened already. There was also shock that we would build another high school given all that the city and district are investing in Somerville High School.

Ms. Normand reported that cost of SHS and taxes came up a lot. One student came to speak in support of Powderhouse. There were a number of families with young children who came to ask about Powderhouse Studios as an option. There was a wide range of opinions on the question.

Dr. Curley shared an update on the Powderhouse school financials. This information is now posted online, on the PHS Proposal page through the Somerville K-12 website. We have, as of February 13th, a detailed budget from the Powderhouse Studios team. The district and applicant now have a pretty good sense of what the school is going to cost over the next 6 years. That cost totals to \$18.1 million and approximately \$3.5 million annually thereafter. The district and Powderhouse Studios team have been working together to develop that budget which again is posted online. We are also working on a joint proposal for the XQ Institute, the original funder of the \$10 million award. We don't have a confirmed agreement yet, but as soon as we do, we will be communicating it out to School Committee and to the public.

Ms. Pitone asked if year 0 in the new budget includes past money spent.

Mr. Futrell asked about the joint proposal to XQ Institute. Because of the time constraints, is there any sense if they've recognized receiving the proposal? Any idea on when we'll be hearing back from XQ?

Superintendent Skipper responded that there has not been confirmation from the Powderhouse Studios team that the letter was sent, or that a response has been received from XQ Institute.

President Ballantyne asked a budget question in reference to the budget documents received. In that 6-year period, of the \$18.1 million total expense, it seems \$7.7 million will come from the \$10 million XQ Institute Grant award. Has the Powderhouse Studios team explained what that \$2.3 million difference will be used for?

Dr. Curley responded and said there were elements of the proposal that went to XQ that revolved around separate research and development efforts, such as a school of education and learning management system. We believe a portion of those funds will go towards those efforts. The district was not part of developing the original application so we do not know for sure.

Dan Futrell asked if Powderhouse Studios is a Somerville Public School and there is a disagreement between school and district leadership in the future, is there a structure on how this would be worked about?

Superintendent Skipper replied that Powderhouse would have an independent governance structure, but Superintendent has the final say as with any district school.

Ms. Pitone asked if the Powderhouse Studios Limited nonprofit would apply for grants in competition with the district?

Superintendent Skipper has made it abundantly clear that going forward, were it to become a public school, any grants that are sought after would have to be in consultation with Somerville Public Schools.

Ms. O'Sullivan is curious about the shift in school personnel, particularly in year five.

Mr. Resnick replied that the shift in the model that you see is in part due to exploring different paths to dual certification that let us reconfigure the staff structure. On the administrative side, we've been talking about the idea of bringing in a chief operating officer / administrator who would report to the superintendent.

Superintendent Skipper feels strongly about having someone who has run a school before. In year five, the school would have one administrator – a certified principal who the district is comfortable with.

Chair Normand wonders how would two positions for such a small school be funded?

Superintendent Skipper said this is one of the challenges with funding a small school. To have two administrators is a significant investment. It is not unreasonable however, when starting a school that may need extra administrative support. The certified principal who has run a building before and will be a steady building leader.

Mr. Resnick added that a higher administrator rate is based on the principal. Salary lines are mixed up in the budget.

Dr. Ackman is curious to know how we can accept the Powderhouse Studios lease when we don't know the costs associated? Mr. Resnick said financial models are part of the budget.

Mr. Green commented that this is a public body, it is not okay for us to commit to funds that we cannot then tell the public where those funds are going. Mr. Futrell has similar concerns about this, giving all of the developer efforts going on in the city.

Mr. Green asked what is the role of current Powderhouse Studios staff? Mr. Resnick replied they can't make assumptions about any current staff having jobs if the school is authorized.

Mr. Green also asked what the hope is for transition of staff? Mr. Resnick said that the school would be overstaffing to start. But all positions would be Somerville Public Schools employees.

Mr. Green asked if it is the district's decision whether or not to hire anyone from the original Powderhouse Studios design team. Mr. Resnick responded that not legally, but XQ is invested in the design team.

President Ballantyne had a follow-up to Mr. Greens question. \$6 million of the grant was focused on R&D. As a city, we have \$390 million in debt obligations. My constituents are telling me that it's significantly more expensive to live here. In 2026, the tax bill will be \$450 more per person in Somerville. I would like to hear from the Superintendent about whether and how we could finance the school.

Chair Normand put Powderhouse in historical context.

Superintendent Skipper clarified that early on the Powderhouse Studios team was not looking to be part of a school within a school. Barr Foundation recognizes the innovative work that is happening at Somerville High School. Ms. Skipper said she had received the applicant's 5,000 pages Friday afternoon and was still reading through, so she will reserve her thinking until March 4th.

Launching a new district school is hard work and requires a lot of resources. The applicant's research and design projects are not covered or agreed upon in the current budget.

Mr. Futrell made a statement of fact that this school has more days in the year than other schools, so its cost should be more. Ms. O'Sullivan asked for someone to clarify the longer school year – and what that would cost.

Ms. Normand said we are compensating teachers for extra 17% of time. Mr. Resnick added that PHS will open 240 days per year, but staff would be there 220 days per year.

Ms. Normand asked about weighted student formula. Has the district done any costing out of Powderhouse if we moved to a weighted student formula?

Superintendent Skipper responded that we could cost out the range, but without knowing which students would enroll and how flexible families may want to be, it would be tough to give a meaningful accurate number.

Dr. Ackman asked if the current proposal is still to be implemented with a Fall 2020 start date, as originally discussed?

Mr. Resnick said Fall 2019 is the technical answer, but Fall 2020 is probably the right answer. This school has been trying to open for a while, so this would be a difficult conversation with XQ. Mr. Resnick said he believed Fall 2020 would still be more appropriate.

Superintendent Skipper wholeheartedly agreed that it would be a huge lift even to open in Fall 2020. District integration group has to be done going forward; this group has not yet convened. We are in full agreement, which is why the applicant designed a Year 0 into the February 13<sup>th</sup> budget.

Mr. Resnick commented that although there have been challenges in working with XQ, they are working for long-term change.

Dr. Ackman looking at weighted enrollment, we had a legal memo from your counsel and lots of supporting evidence. In digging through these all I found was that there is solid legal footing for gender selection. Can you elaborate more on the legality of the enrollment algorithm?

Mr. Resnick said they don't want the lottery to rely on human judgement in selecting students. We asked our counsel to frame his opinion this way.

Ms. Normand expressed that we're a week away from a vote and the lack of detail in this plan is concerning. The lottery is a challenge. Can you speak in more detail about how the lottery would actually work?

Mr. Resnick said that there are significant legal and technical issues with the lottery as currently written. Mr. Green is concerned that our lawyers and Powderhouse Studios lawyers seem to disagree about the weighted enrollment lottery.

Dr. Ackman asked, for the purpose of our vote, what population is the weighted student lottery based on?

Mr. Resnick said that what is currently in the 2017 Innovation Plan is Somerville youth at large. But that School Committee could make this determination ultimately.

Ms. Normand said that having been in the 2nd Innovation Planning Committee, she thought we were paralleling the student population of the SPS district. This is the first time that she's heard that it would be up to School Committee how that population is represented.

Mr. Green added that the Somerville youth are a much richer and whiter demographic than Somerville Public Schools serves as a district. What is Powderhouse Studios going to do to address equity in the city?

Ms. Normand asked again which population are the applicants are looking to mirror if the school is authorized. Mr. Resnick responded Somerville Public Schools.

Mr. Green commented that this is something that we as a district struggle with. Mr. Resnick said this is why we are committed to weighted lottery.

Mr. Futrell expressed his discomfort in having these kind of issues – legal issues particularly – arise this late in the voting process.

Ms. O'Sullivan wondered how reasonable is it that we can legally and adequately populate the school with the current algorithm? It seems impossible for Fall 2019. What happens if we don't get a proper number of kids applying?

Ms. Pitone asked if the algorithm didn't produce a representative population, would we leave seats open?

Superintendent Skipper replied that we might weight similar to controlled choice by neighborhood. Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) schools make it difficult to determine poverty rates at the individual student level. Many students no longer complete lunch applications. Powderhouse would also have to do intense outreach and recruitment to find students.

Ms. O'Sullivan is curious about statements relating to the metrics named in the innovation regulations. Do those metrics need to be decided by now or after approval? When will those be developed?

Mr. Resnick stated that the Innovation School statute lays out 6 or 7 dimensions, including things like attendance rate, discipline rate, MCAS performance etc. I believe in the innovation plan, a proposal for what the goals to which PHS should be held accountable as part of that are included. Setting those goals would be part of the ongoing innovation plan approval process, but also part of the governance process and school improving planning process.

Superintendent Skipper said we need an answer from the grantor. Anything behind \$1.5 million over the 3-4 years, would be difficult for the district to do. Otherwise we would have to make strand consolidations or accept higher

ratios are other schools. We hope to have this information next week when we hear from the XQ funder how much of the original grant can be used to support school costs.

Ms. Pitone then said she had a statement and a question. The political decision is not about the excitement about the idea behind this school, but the equity and programmatic changes SPS would have to make to authorize this school. We have been fortunate in the city's investment in the district, and not having to make these changes. How would you justify this amount of investment for such a small number of students?

Mr. Resnick responded that as we talk to families three things come up. 1. XQ's funding is about a like Willy Wonka bringing outside money to the district 2. Powderhouse started by assuming sufficiently broad and diverse youth would be attracted to the school and district and 3. We have always wanted Powderhouse Studios to exist as a part of Somerville Public Schools.

Ms. Pitone asked what does the Willy Wonka XQ portion mean? Of the constituents who support this, how many think the \$10 million will make it cost neutral. It's hard to know how much of the \$10 million is going to the school or Somerville Public Schools students.

Ms. Normand added that our responsibility goes beyond 5 years. We need to be thinking about longer term context.

Ms. Normand then requested a draft legal memo on how we can proceed with a vote next week.

Dr. Ackman asked if there is a plan for meeting the service needs of Special Education students during the 20-day gap?

President Ballantyne shared for viewers and people here, City Council will have a finance committee meeting this week. There will be a discussion of the financial impacts of this proposal. The school department is a department within the executive branch. Because we aren't clear about the finances, I wanted to make sure my colleagues could ask financial questions. The hearing will be here in the Chambers — Financial Committee of the Whole on Tuesday.

Ms. Pitone then read a prepared opinion.

During my SC Office Hours over the last weeks, in many emails and at the two public hearings have heard from those who are excited by the proposed school and creative model, a belief in the applicant and those considering it for their student, if it is adopted. I have heard from constituents who are questioning how the adoption will impact the rest of the district (financially and initiative wise) with respect to the implementation plan.

I appreciate how my colleague Ms. Palmer clarified the potential misunderstanding in the community about the restrictions on the \$10 million -- that it cannot all be used to defer district costs for the startup.

Although I cannot speak for my colleagues, I plan on making my final decision when the School Committee completes deliberation on March 4th. I can share the four primary considerations that I will base my decision on: the design of the school idea, the viability of the plan (including the financials), how it may impact the district, and district equity considerations. The impact to the district includes the potential to explore innovative ideas that can be adopted in other areas of the district as well as diversion of both funds and resources from other initiatives or opportunities due to the investment in the proposed school.

What I can also share is both the district staff and applicant have invested a great deal of effort in developing both the idea of the school and a plan to implement since the innovation plan was submitted for consideration by the Somerville Teachers Union in the spring of 2017 – and increasingly over the community process since early January. I am appreciative of the efforts of my colleagues, who have various skills and experience in education and business, to understand and give sincere consideration to the proposed school as well as request input from the community. I extend my thanks to the community, district staff, my colleagues, and the applicants for all the effort during this public process. No question that there has been a great deal of effort to give this proposed school the best opportunity for success and a thorough vetting.

I understand that not every item of the plan can be detailed, but there are many open, concerning issues.

What has been presented to date to the public has been a creative idea for a school we have recently learned is combination of a Research & Development (R&D) including learning management system, curriculum development, a policy institute, and a school. Specifically, \$6 million of the \$10 million from the grant was earmarked for R&D versus to offset district expenses as originally understood. There are restrictions on the XQ grant and this district

and the applicant are working with the Grantor to understand what amount could be used to offset district expenses. The primary question to me is: is this whole package a valuable investment for the district? What is the financial implication to the district as we invest \$10.7 million from the district (based on average per pupil costs, reallocated from current schools) and \$1.2 million from the city over five years?

The applicant's primary investment to date of nearly \$1 million has been towards their staff and research and development efforts, including the learning management system (a software solution to track and map student work to state standards). It does not appear to be used to resolve open questions and concerns in the Innovation Plan, including the enrollment plan, curriculum standards, or Intellectual Property.

Our legal counsel has not reviewed our opinions on legal issues such as enrollment lottery (somewhat discussed tonight, I agree with Mr. Futrell that central and district would address this appropriately but realize there may be a problem with the financial model if we don't meet the enrollment number with expected level of student diversity), Intellectual Property (SPS is funded by tax revenue generated from the public), or hiring.

Fall 2020 appears to be the responsible start option for students, as opposed to Fall 2019. I have not been convinced by the documentation about Intellectual Property and would only consider moving forward if this was revisited with approval by the School Committee. Location of the school in the future would be controlled by the district once it is a district school but know the scope or terms of the rental agreement.

Mr. Green then stated anyone who has heard my line of question probably understands my concerns. I am deeply concerned and don't see a path of how Powderhouse Studios addresses the concerns of the district. I have no great love for the traditional school model — and I don't vote against innovation. Idea of PHS speaks to me. All schools should be going in this direction. We will be voting on a school, not an idea. Procedure that has gotten us to this point does not fill me with confidence. Money, bandwidth and resources have been intense. This would be the focus of our innovation for the next two years at a minimum. I worry about where the money would come from and where the time of staff will come from.

Ms. Normand did not prepare a statement for tonight. She reviewed the Innovation Plan statement vote two years ago — this statement still feels relevant. I love the idea, but I still have so many questions. The information we have received so late in the process has been unnerving.

Mr. Resnick said the audience for Research & Development is not the academic community, but rather to support Somerville youth. This is part of the roll that we see Powderhouse playing.

Ms. Palmer made a brief statement similar to Mr. Green. I am less concerned than some of my colleagues about unanswered questions. My concern is primarily about priorities and limited resources within the district.

## **B. Personnel Report**

Superintendent Skipper read the personnel report and noted the retirements of two teachers: Carol Murphy, retiring after 33 years of service in Somerville Public Schools, and Valerie Kostandos, retiring after 8 years of service in Somerville Public schools.

## **VI. REPORT OF SUBCOMMITTEES**

### **A. School Committee Meeting for Long Range Planning: January 16, 2019 (Ms. Normand)**

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Long Range Planning of January 16, 2019.

### **B. School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction Committee of the Whole: January 28, 2019 (Ms. O'Sullivan)**

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction Committee of the Whole of January 28, 2019.

### **C. School Committee Meeting for Finance and Facilities: January 30, 2019 (Mr. Futrell)**

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Finance and Facilities of January 30, 2019.

### **D. School Committee Meeting for Rules Management: February 4, 2019**

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Rules Management of February 4, 2019.

All subcommittee reports tabled until next meeting.

## **VII. NEW BUSINESS**

### **A. Field Trips (Recommended action: approval)**

**April 4, 2019 – April 5, 2019**

Somerville High School Band and Drumline Students will visit New York City. Transportation via charter bus. Student cost \$160.



**May 29, 2019 – May 31, 2019**

Healey 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Students will visit Washington D.C. Transportation via bus. Student cost \$400.

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

**B. Acceptance of Donations** (recommended action: approval)

The Superintendent recommends the acceptance, with gratitude, of the following donations:

<b>Donation</b>	<b>Donor</b>	<b>City, State</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Program donated to</b>
Electrical Supplies	Timothy Beckwith, K&J Integrated Systems	Burlington, MA	\$1,500	CTE Electrical Program at SHS
Monetary	Peter and Janice Forcellese	Teaticket, MA	\$3,000	Somerville High School's Golf Team

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

**VIII. ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS**

**Ms. Pitone**

She would like to revisit the policy of public comment, and whether it should be limited to Somerville residents.

Mr. Green commented that his intent as an author of public comment was never to limit it to residents.

**Ms. Palmer**

Ms. Palmer had a few comments.

I think we did purposely limit this to Somerville residents, but we should revisit this for district teachers and administrative staff.

I was extremely uncomfortable with the response to public comment. Public applause made me uncomfortable given that others here might have opposing views.

We should have said that written comment would be welcome. We might make the public comment messaging consistent and read them at the top of every meeting.

Rules should revisit limits to district and administrative staff in public comment. Also create a script to open meetings about public comment process.

Ms. Pitone asked: should this pressing question come up in new business?

**IX. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:18 p.m.

**Related Documents**

- Agenda
- PHS Budget Memo
- PHS Budget Draft
- Homework Policy Teacher Letters

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
BOARD OF ALDERMEN CHAMBERS  
REGULAR MEETING – FEBRUARY 25, 2019 – 7:00 P.M.**

Somerville Public Schools - School Committee Vision Statement/Goals

*We believe in developing the whole child - the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical potential of all students - by providing students with the skills, opportunities, and resources that will nurture innovative ideas, foster pride in diversity, inspire students to become lifelong learners and empower them to enrich their communities.*

- Goal #1: Increase achievement and access for all students. Reduce all performance gaps by half.
- Goal #2: Develop and implement a comprehensive PreK-12 social-emotional learning framework that provides students with the skills they need for social and academic success.
- Goal #3: Increase engagement with the community to reflect the community in which we live.
- Goal #4: Continue to develop and implement innovative ways of measuring student academic performance and school quality such as formative assessment, performance-based tasks, and whole quality indicators.
- Goal #5: Develop a comprehensive plan for Universal Kindergarten Readiness that supports intellectual, physical, and social/emotional growth from birth to Pre-K.
- Goal #6: Develop and implement a strategy to recruit, develop, and retain a diverse and talented staff.

**ORDER OF BUSINESS**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Call to order with a moment of silence and a salute to the flag of the United States of America.

**II. REPORT OF STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES**

**III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- January 14, 2019
- January 28, 2019

**IV. PUBLIC COMMENT**

**V. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT**

**A. District Report**

- Powderhouse Studios Update and Deliberations

**B. Personnel Report**

**VI. REPORT OF SUBCOMMITTEES**

**E. School Committee Meeting for Long Range Planning:** January 16, 2019 (Ms. Normand)

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Long Range Planning of January 16, 2019.

**F. School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction Committee of the Whole:** January 28, 2019 (Ms. O'Sullivan)

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Education Programs and Instruction Committee of the Whole of January 28, 2019.

**G. School Committee Meeting for Finance and Facilities:** January 30, 2019 (Mr. Futrell)

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Finance and Facilities of January 30, 2019.

**H. School Committee Meeting for Rules Management:** February 4, 2019

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Rules Management of February 4, 2019.

**VII. NEW BUSINESS**

**C. Field Trips (Recommended action: approval)  
**April 4, 2019 – April 5, 2019****

Somerville High School Band and Drumline Students will visit New York City. Transportation via charter bus. Student cost \$160.

**May 29, 2019 – May 31, 2019**

Healey 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Students will visit Washington D.C. Transportation via bus. Student cost \$400.

**D. 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
Electrical Supplies	Timothy Beckwith, K&J Integrated Systems	Burlington, MA	\$1,500	CTE Electrical Program at SHS
Monetary	Peter and Janice Forcellese	Teaticket, MA	\$3,000	Somerville High School's Golf Team

**VIII. ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS**

**IX. ADJOURNMENT**

To: Somerville School Committee

From: Jeff J. Curley, Ed.L.D. Date: February 25, 2019  
 Re: Powderhouse Studios budget update

**PURPOSE**

This memo explains the Powderhouse Studios (PHS) budget, submitted February 13th 2019, detailing agreed expenses and potential revenues. PHS is a proposed in-district innovation school that would serve 120-160 Somerville students if authorized and fully enrolled. The budget reflects confirmed school costs and a path to sustainability through possible, but yet unconfirmed, revenue sources.

**BUDGET OVERVIEW**

The Powderhouse Studios budget includes six years of operating expenses, five of which would be open to students following authorization. The estimated expense of PHS over six years is \$18.1 million and approximately \$3.5 million annually thereafter. For reference, the district's local appropriation budget for FY2019 was \$72.6 million. The district and PHS team have a shared agreement about the school's estimated expenses.

Year 0	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total PHS budget over 6 years
\$1,121,148	\$2,551,287	\$3,329,514	\$3,977,114	\$3,670,556	\$3,527,948	\$18,177,567

**LOCAL REVENUE**

The current budget anticipates local district revenues totaling around \$10.7 million over six years. The City would also be asked to contribute an additional \$1.4 million primarily for PHS staff benefits.

Year 0	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total local revenues over 6 years
\$300,000	\$690,352	\$1,435,932	\$2,451,492	\$3,577,583	\$3,666,957	\$12,122,316

The district and city's understanding until January 2019 was that the \$10 million XQ award would offset school startup costs to help hold harmless other schools and programs in the early years of the launch of Powderhouse Studios. On January 14th, as the authorization process formally began, the applicants objected to this agreement for the first time. In negotiations since, the city has committed \$300,000 in startup funding and the district has committed up to \$1.1 million – a level of funding at which we believe existing district schools and programs would not be harmed. There is currently a significant gap in local revenue funding that the district and PHS team are still working to resolve.

**EXPLORATORY REVENUE**

The February 13th budget reflects the potential for \$5.8 million in unconfirmed exploratory revenue from state and federal sources. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education operates several grant funding programs for which Powderhouse Studios could be eligible. Most of these are competitive state grant programs. PHS is proposing the possibility of applying for Chapter 74 status, which is how Career and Technical Education programs are funded. If PHS were to receive this designation, it would add approximately \$4,700 per student enrolled in Powderhouse to Somerville's foundation budget.

Year 0	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total possible additional public revenues over 6 years
\$0	\$509,142	\$876,744	\$1,245,886	\$1,615,029	\$1,615,029	\$5,861,830

**PRIVATE REVENUE**

In 2016, applying independently of the district, PHS was awarded \$10 million as part of the XQ Super School Project. The current budget anticipates that approximately \$6.5 million of the XQ award could be contributed to the operationalization of the school. Some portion of the award has already been spent by the PHS team to cover design and startup costs, and the budget estimates that an additional \$1.2 million will be spent in the year before authorization. PHS and XQ also expect some amount of the \$10 million will support research and development efforts including the establishment of a policy institute and creation of a learning management system. These costs are not fully understood nor reflected in the current school budget.

Year 0	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total unconfirmed XQ revenues over 6 years

\$1,271,148	\$1,967,793	\$1,958,838	\$1,759,173	\$543,319	\$276,463	\$7,776,733
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We have been working with the Powderhouse team to develop a joint proposal for XQ about how the private award revenue could be used to support the successful launch of the school, but we do not yet have a confirmed agreement to share with School Committee.

The school's budget overview is available here: <http://www.somerville.k12.ma.us/powderhouse-proposal>.

Powderhouse Studios - draft budget summary, Feb 13, 2019							
	Grant Years						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>Enrollment and Staff Assumptions</i>							
Total students	0	40	80	120	160	160	
Total staff	6	9	12	17	19	18	
Staff to student ratio		1:4	1:7	1:7	1:8	1:9	
<i>Expenses</i>							<i>Six-year total</i>
Payroll	\$582,000	\$915,500	\$1,206,500	\$1,691,500	\$1,885,500	\$1,746,000	\$8,027,000
Benefits	\$145,500	\$228,875	\$301,625	\$211,438	\$0	\$0	\$887,438
Substitutes	\$0	\$18,648	\$26,640	\$39,960	\$45,288	\$45,288	\$175,824
Curriculum	\$9,000	\$73,500	\$138,000	\$205,500	\$268,500	\$267,000	\$961,500
Technology	\$9,648	\$78,791	\$147,934	\$220,294	\$287,829	\$286,221	\$1,030,717
Food	\$0	\$96,000	\$192,000	\$288,000	\$384,000	\$384,000	\$1,344,000
Transportation	\$0	\$27,510	\$55,020	\$82,530	\$110,040	\$110,040	\$385,140
Facilities	\$375,000	\$493,538	\$612,076	\$730,613	\$474,151	\$474,151	\$3,159,529
District support services	\$0	\$618,925	\$649,719	\$507,279	\$215,248	\$215,248	\$2,206,419
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>\$1,121,148</b>	<b>\$2,551,287</b>	<b>\$3,329,514</b>	<b>\$3,977,114</b>	<b>\$3,670,556</b>	<b>\$3,527,948</b>	<b>\$18,177,567</b>
<i>Revenues</i>							
<i>Local public revenue</i>							<i>Six-year total</i>
SPS PPA contribution	\$0	\$690,352	\$1,435,932	\$2,240,054	\$3,106,208	\$3,230,457	\$10,703,004
City discretionary SPS budget increase	\$300,000	\$0	\$0	\$211,438	\$471,375	\$436,500	\$1,419,313
<b>Local public revenue subtotal</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>	<b>\$690,352</b>	<b>\$1,435,932</b>	<b>\$2,451,492</b>	<b>\$3,577,583</b>	<b>\$3,666,957</b>	<b>\$12,122,316</b>
<i>Possible additional public revenue (exploratory)</i>							<i>Six-year total</i>
National School Lunch Program	\$0	\$43,142	\$84,744	\$127,886	\$171,029	\$171,029	\$597,830
MA DESE programs	\$0	\$466,000	\$792,000	\$1,118,000	\$1,444,000	\$1,444,000	\$5,264,000
<b>Possible additional public revenue (exploratory) subtotal</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$509,142</b>	<b>\$876,744</b>	<b>\$1,245,886</b>	<b>\$1,615,029</b>	<b>\$1,615,029</b>	<b>\$5,861,830</b>
<i>Private revenue</i>							<i>Six-year total</i>
XQ contribution to PHS operating budget	\$1,121,148	\$1,817,793	\$1,808,838	\$1,609,173	\$393,319	\$126,463	\$6,876,733
XQ contribution to District integration costs	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$900,000
<b>Private revenue subtotal</b>	<b>\$1,271,148</b>	<b>\$1,967,793</b>	<b>\$1,958,838</b>	<b>\$1,759,173</b>	<b>\$543,319</b>	<b>\$276,463</b>	<b>\$7,776,733</b>
<b>Total revenues</b>	<b>\$1,571,148</b>	<b>\$2,658,145</b>	<b>\$3,394,770</b>	<b>\$4,210,665</b>	<b>\$4,120,902</b>	<b>\$3,943,419</b>	<b>\$19,899,049</b>

Dear Somerville School Committee,

We are deeply concerned about the newly released homework policy.

Our concerns fall into two categories: the content of the proposal itself and the process through which this decision was made.

We are greatly concerned about several elements of the homework policy.

- **Students will not be prepared for high school.** Our job is to prepare our students for high school and beyond. This new homework policy explicitly recognizes the importance of time management skills and the vital role that homework plays in developing these academic skills. We are concerned that the limits you set forth will inhibit our ability to prepare our students for high school. Furthermore, there is a clear lack of alignment between the high school policy and the upper elementary policy. We are concerned that this gap will make the transition to high school, already a challenging transition, that much harder. Students will be unprepared for the rigorous homework expectations, which at times could be 3 hours *a night*. This policy prevents an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student, let alone a younger student, from being assigned reading on a nightly basis. This policy makes it virtually impossible to assign papers.
- **Narrowing of the curriculum.** The Massachusetts Learnings Standards are extensive and we are always striving to cover all of the standards. We are concerned that this policy will negatively impact our ability to cover all of the standards and ensure student understanding. Homework plays a vital role in that process and if teachers are going to lose that time spent on task at home it will need to be made up during the school day. Teachers will be forced to make a choice between deeply covering most of the standards or rushing the learning to ensure they cover all of the standards during class time.
- **Disproportionate impact on high needs students.** This policy as written will disproportionately negatively impact our highest needs students. This homework policy makes assumptions about the enrichment activities that our students are engaging in outside of the school day. Many of our students do not have access to after school activities and greatly benefit from the structure that homework provides. In addition, we have a shared goal to close achievement gaps. Thoughtfully assigned homework is an important tool for teachers to support students in additional practice and skill building, thereby closing achievement gaps. To set an arbitrary time limit on homework ignores teachers' professionalism in this matter.
- **Inflexible.** Embedded in this policy are many assumptions about students and their families. Many of us have heard from parents in our community that homework plays a vital role for them to monitor their children's learning and progress. As a school system serving a diverse community we must have flexibility in our policies. As educators we understand that a one size fits all approach doesn't work in a single classroom let alone across a system as complex as Somerville. Our strength is in our diversity and with that comes families of varied cultural backgrounds with different expectations around homework. Our policies need to give teachers flexibility to meet those diverse needs and expectations.

We question the process by which the school committee arrived at the homework policy. This represents a dramatic shift from past practice. A shift such as this should be implemented after significant input from students, families, and teachers.

- **Timing.** If this policy is going to be implemented effectively and equitably across the district then it cannot be introduced mid year. Teachers should have been given ample notice to prepare and the district should have had time to offer professional development.
- **Teacher input.** As far as we are aware, few, if any teachers were asked for input on creating a homework policy to best meet the needs of our students. The School Committee consistently commends our teachers as hardworking talented professionals. The apparent exclusion from this process is disrespectful and not in the best interests of students.

- **Community input.** A policy this far reaching merits at least a public comment period and deserves a thoughtful and prolonged process to hear from all our students and families, particularly those who have historically been marginalized. As far as we are aware, there was no public process. Who did the school committee hear from when they designed this policy? Whose needs does this policy meet?

Signed by Healey School teachers listed below,

Stephen Y. Stephano, Wanda Finigian McLaren, Wilhem Jacques, Charles H. Graham III, Mary Ann Cloutier, Dayshawn J. Simmons, Annie Rathjens, Peadar Dooley, Nicole Madden, Emma Daniels, Chris Mitchell

February 12, 2019

Dear Somerville School Committee,

As a teacher at the John F. Kennedy School, I am writing to express my concerns over the recently-released homework policy for students in kindergarten through eighth grade. My concerns center around:

1. **Student preparedness.** By severely limiting the amount of out-of-school learning for middle school students, students will not develop the independence needed for high school and beyond. A child's transition from two to three hours per week in eighth grade to unrestricted homework in ninth grade will not be smooth. Each year of school should correlate with additional expectations and work load; the trajectory of time and days per week of homework is inconsistent with instilling more responsibilities over time.
2. **Life-long skill-building.** Extrinsicly, homework cultivates necessary life skills, including self-discipline, time management, and work ethic. Such skills are vital in child and adolescent development because they are needed in all facets of adult life. Supporting the whole child requires that we build these skills in our students, and homework is one means of doing so.
3. **Unequal impact on students.** Homework reinforces core concepts and allows for additional practice; this is particularly important for high-needs students in order to narrow achievement gaps. While high-achieving students will have access to enrichment activities despite the new homework policy, high-needs students are less likely to have that same access. For some students, homework is the only activity they have outside of the school day and is therefore an important part of their out-of-school routine.
4. **Roll-out.** The policy was sent to parents through social media, hours before it was released to teachers. This both privileged the parents and blindsided the teachers. As equal partners with the school committee and parents, teachers deserved to review the proposed policy in advance of its implementation, and to be notified of its enactment at the same time as families.
5. **Timing.** Teachers have been planning diligently for months how to cover all of the standards in time for the spring's state assessments. This includes planning homework assignments and long-term projects. To implement a major policy initiative in the middle of the year with no advance notice disrupts and disrespects what we have already planned.

In light of these concerns, I request that the homework policy be stayed until the 2019-2020 school year. In the meantime, I ask the School Committee to consult with teachers of all grade

levels and disciplines in order to develop a homework policy that promotes student wellness and accountability while protecting teacher autonomy.

Thank you for your consideration. Sincerely,

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Anthony Murr



Dear Somerville School Committee,

I am concerned about the newly released Homework Policy. I have 3 specific areas of concern: The content of the policy, the process through which the policy was crafted, and the manner in which the new policy was delivered.

The content of the policy fails to mention nightly reading, science fair, or other long term projects, and requests for challenge work, just to name a few.

As far as we are aware, no teachers were included in the process of crafting this policy. The Somerville School Committee consistently commends our teachers as hardworking talented professionals but to be excluded from this process is *disrespectful* and not in the best interest of our students. A policy such as this deserves a thoughtful and prolonged process to hear from all community members, especially teacher feedback.

The new policy was delivered on Wednesday 2/6/2019, however staff are aware that the policy was posted on several social media platforms on Monday 2/4/2019. In addition, the timing (past the mid-year) of implementing a new policy that affects many aspects of teacher planning and possibly grading is not appropriate.

The lack of thought with which this policy was crafted and released to teachers and the public is disappointing to say the least.

Sincerely,  
Sandra Dumas  
Brown School, Grade 5  
Lifelong Somerville Resident