

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

March 8, 2021

7:00p.m. - GoToWebinar

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 MayorCurtatone **ABSENT** –1- Mr.McLaughlin

Chair Green announced interpretation for the meeting and asked interpreters to introduced themselves to the audience: Haitian Creole – Clark Jean-Baptiste, Spanish: Michaela Yang, Portuguese: Elaine Metzker

II. REPORT OF STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

Student Representative Brian Recinos was present and reported on the following topics:

- The Library has sent out a survey asking students to comment on equipment needs for new school
- Seniors have been invited into the new building
- Varsity sports has started, basketball, swimming, hockey
- A committee has been formed to plan senior events
- Senior Class Reps are sending emails to get donations for prom next year
- The administration is working on a plan to give each student a tour of the new building

III. MAYOR CURTATONE'S UPDATE

A. Building Update

Mr. Raiche spoke regarding the high school building reopening:

He reported that it is very exciting to have students back in the building and that other buildings would be completed if so many issues had not been found. There is enough outside air and portable units so there is no trouble with occupancy. Honeywell has completed all work they can to date, some items need engineering expertise so that data has been collected and has gone to the engineers and it is being reviewed with contractors as well. Then they will have a final timeline to complete all of the work. Once they evaluate the work and it has been completed, they will retest the building, to then be able to get recertification on a building basis. Until that time, they will be doing calculations on a room-by-room basis to support the phased plan to demonstrate how the systems and the portable units meet our thresholds. This is for the benefit of the teachers union and the parents so everyone feels a level of confidence for the return.

Ms. Barish asked Mr. Raiche to confirm the timeline for in-person learning posted on the website. Mr. Raiche confirmed that was the case.

Ms. Pitone asked to get some documentation of what the building performance requirements are in terms of ventilation and filtration, whether that is air exchanges or CO2 levels. Mr. Raiche answered that it all comes back to the risk factors that were published back in the fall. Essentially, what we are targeting is 20% outside air; if we don't hit that target we are targeting six air exchanges per hour, which is more filtered air. The CO2 is a way of monitoring building system performance and we are using that as an additional threshold to see if we need to deploy more air exchange units in any area where we are not hitting the target of CO2 that we want. Ms. Pitone also asked about the number of portable units we have and the number deployed and how confident we are in the inventory. Mr. Raiche said he is very comfortable through phase three and said they have an additional 61 units being delivered that will be stockpiled at the Edgerly if needed. Once those come in, there will be 250.

Superintendent Skipper asked if we could take Athletics next for a brief update since Mr. Stanley Vieira, Ms. Michele Kelly and Dr. Jeff Curley were ready to speak. She mentioned that there had been some questions about athletic testing.

Mr. Vieira, Athletic Director reported that we had a great opening week of practice; the only hiccup was that the building was not ready. The basketball program is practicing at the ESCS and that went smoothly. The hockey program at Somerville Memorial Rink and the swim program was at the Kennedy School and all went well with those programs. Kids were happy to get back to practice and games. The first week of testing both initial baseline and pool testing which happened several weeks ago and this past Friday, had a few positive results. He gave kudos to Michele Kelly who followed up with parents and called parents over the weekend to let them know about quarantine and next steps. Mr. Vieira had a Zoom last evening to assure parents about everything involved in the testing process. He wants to thank the Mayor and Dr. Curley for all their efforts in maintaining a good line of communication with everyone.

Ms. Kelly, Athletic Trainer added that they had a few positive students who were asymptomatic, who knew how quickly it would have been spread not only with the students but also with the community. She is grateful for the testing although it has been hectic. We are continuing to work out a program with Cambridge Health Alliance to continue testing. As far as quarantining goes, we are following state guidelines and MIA guidelines, which was what was presented to the School Committee. We quarantined an entire team so we followed procedure and we called parents and followed up with a Zoom meeting. Today another email was sent out regarding what the Covid 19 procedures are and reiterated what you do outside of school affects what happens in the buildings with the other athletes. They have been really great wearing their masks and asking for new masks when they are wet. They are doing a great job in our presence and regulating each other outside of school.

Superintendent Skipper thanked them both for all their work and to Doug Kress who came in over the weekend to test the areas the athletes were using. Since so many rumors were going around, she wanted to clarify exactly what is happening. She asked Dr. Curley to speak about separating out the athletes from the rest of the student body who will be returning to school.

Dr. Jeff Curley thanked everyone involved over the weekend. Last week they did over 1000 tests for 700 staff and students. He explained that one of the reasons we are looking to move the athletes to their own testing platform is because it is a different protocol, a different level of risk and we want to make sure that the testing is tailored to that particular mitigation. As you may have heard we are under contract with Tufts University and that contract is specifically looking to bring students back in person and we have worked it out with Tufts until we can find a more appropriate vendor who can provide testing for our athletes. We appreciate the parent's flexibility as we work out details so for the next couple of weeks we can work under the Tufts and Brode apparatus and Mr. Vieira and Ms. Kelly can make sure it is tailored to the athletes.

Questions:

Ms. Pitone asked if the team was put on quarantine or did Ms. Kelley mean they were just quarantined from playing sports for ten days? Ms. Kelley said that they are not doing the contact tracing for the athletes that is being done by the city, but through their protocols they are loosely quarantining and so there is no sport for the ten days and they are asking families to contact the city to let them know if they are a close contact or not so that's where the discrepancy was happening and they had a meeting with the city yesterday to clarify that.

Dr. Phillips said that she heard that it was not just varsity sports that were starting but other sports as well and could they clarify who is eligible to participate? Mr. Vieira answered that all sports are available at this time but Varsity and junior varsity only. Dr. Phillips said that she would like something sent out to the parents that states who is eligible to play at this time. She also mentioned that parents have told her that their child insists they have an unofficial practice and the parents don't know whom to contact to verify if that is the case. Mr. Vieira said parents can reach out to them at any time about any sport or practice issues and he will get back to them ASAP.

Superintendent Skipper clarified that no one but the J.V. and Varsity sports are running right now. Michele Kelley added that only winter sports are running right now. Over the next few weeks fall sport athletes will get registered and cleared and then to the field. It is on the athletics website for clarification.

Mr. Vieira took this time to compliment the Department of Public Works for all their hard work in managing the facilities.

Superintendent Skipper said they are working very hard on the hybrid and have some tentative agreements along with our SEU partners and some of the information will be forthcoming after ratification. One question some parents have had is around the announcement of Friday from the Board of Secondary Education and DESE. The superintendent does not have information yet from DESE on a waiver process, that information should be coming tomorrow. There are three buildings offline and three schools we have had to relocate and there is limited space for the high school students. This has to address that with DESE so they are aware of our unique situation.

We are doing the best we can to get access for high school students with athletics and with CTE students are starting on the week of March 15, for the teachers and the students that are coming forthcoming and to launch learning labs in phase two. Mr. LaGambina will be messaging the senior class and we are committed to all classes to be able to get them into the building and be able to participate in learning labs, guidance and college efforts etc. Once we have a sense from DESE about how the waiver will fit with us then we will be able to proceed with the hybrid as we were planning and this is a highly complex endeavor, as with some of the buildings being offline and doing what no other district is doing and that is testing every individual in the building additionally we are undertaking a hybrid while keeping our remote in the best possible shape that we can. There are a lot of complexities and we will go ahead with the hybrid, once we get an answers from DESE then we can revise what is being done and make accommodations.

Mr. Chad Mazza, Asst. Superintendent of Schools is presented a PowerPoint: (To be attached)

- Transition to In Person Learning
 - Daily Screening
 - Face Coverings
 - Physical Distancing
 - Hand Washing
 - Covid Testing
 - Air Quality
- Successful Transition to Phase 2A
 - Students & Teachers successfully transitioned
 - High needs student programs transitioned
 - 80 students/60 staff returned to in-person at SHS & Capuano
 - Students currently attending 4 half days
 - Wednesday stays remote
 - Students & Staff completed baseline testing & required to participate in routine testing while in person
- Transition to In-Person Learning Schedule of Phases
 - 1- Ongoing
 - 2A March 1-4
 - 2B March 15-18
 - 3A March 22-25
 - 3B March 29-April 1
 - 4A April 5-April 8
 - 4B April 26-29
- Transition to In-Person Learning Building Assignments
 - Argenziano
 - Brown @ SHS Mods
 - Capuano
 - East Somerville
 - Healey @ SHS
 - Kennedy

- Next Wave/Full Circle @ SHS
- Somerville High School Most 9-12 remain remote, some CTE
- Winter Hill @ SHS
- West Somerville
- Ready to Welcome Students & Staff in Phase 2B
 - Week of March 15th
 - Remote teaching Mon & Tues
 - First Day in-person Thursday March 18
 - Students Attending 4 days
 - Wednesday remains remote
 - Students & Staff required to complete baseline Covid & routine Covid testing
 - Additional high needs special education programs ECIP, Multi-Grades, Life Skills, Transition Program, RR & ASD Learning Labs
 - English Learners (K-8) in SEI 1
 - Multilingual Learning Labs (9-12)
 - CTE seniors
 - 50 SHS juniors in CTE programs to help teachers
- Ready to Welcome Students & Staff in Phase 3A
 - Week of March 22nd
 - First to transition to the hybrid in-person model
 - Students divided into two cohorts
 - Cohort A attends Mon/Tues remote Thurs/Fri
 - Cohort B attends Thurs/Fri remote Mon/Tues
 - Wednesday remains remote across the district
 - Phase 3 includes
 - All pre-K and K
 - Students in SEEK
 - Redirect & House Learning Labs
 - Next Wave/Full Circle
 - Somerville Child Care Center
- PreK & K Return to School Plan

Preschool and Kindergarten children have unique developmental needs to consider as we prepare for a successful transition to in-person learning.

- Children will be getting to know buildings
- Never met peers or staff

Best practices for orienting young children to school & helping children who may need time to acclimate successfully

- classroom visit
- half day schedule for 2-3 days
- moving to regular schedule

To help children 7 families prepare for transition:

- Provide detailed information in advance
- Start with half day before full transition time

What will PreK & K look like for the first three weeks?

Week #1 Half Day Phases-In Days

- Cohort A March 25th Cohort B March 26th
 - 8:45 am-11:00 am
 - Grab & Go Lunch

Week #2 Half-Day Phase-In Days

- Cohort A March 29th Cohort B March 31-April 1st
 - 8:45 am-11 am

Week #3 beginning the week April 5

- Cohort A April 5th & 6th Cohort B April 8th-9th
 - 8:45 am-1:45 pm (full day) Pre-K
 - 8:10 am-1:45 pm (full day) K

What will in-person Hybrid Learning look like?

- In-person Learning (2days)
 - Breakfast
 - Morning Meeting
 - X Block
 - Math & Literacy
 - Recess & Lunch
 - Choice Time
 - Structured & Unstructured play, both inside and outside
 - Daily activities to address social & emotional learning & community building
- Remote Learning (3 days)
 - Prioritizing continuity during remote days so all students feel connected to their class
 - Morning Meeting
 - X Block
 - Specialist
 - Asynchronous work
 - Hands-on exploratory to enhance & enrich in-person learning
 - Kindergarten students will have two specialists' blocks on remote days

We are continuing to work with the SEU to finalize plans for the hybrid model & will share additional details once the model is finalized.

- Additional Support & Programming
 - School counselors developed age-appropriate SEL lessons teachers can access
 - Morning meeting to help set the tone for the start of the day
 - Covid-targeted resources to help students process impact of Covid 19
 - Continuing to use Second Step SEL curriculum to help build safe & supportive communities
 - Continuing to work with partner agencies on providing SEL & mental health supports
 - Professional Development for staff focused on relationship building and strategies to help students with transition to in-person learning
- Community Schools Afterschool
 - Continue programming at Argenziano, Brown, Capuano, ESCS, Healey, Kennedy, Winter Hill, WSNS
 - Once in-person begins for PK/K, (wk of March22) cohort schedule will be reversed to coincide and provide continuity of in-person care:
 - Cohort A will switch to Mon/Tues afterschool
 - Cohort B will switch to Thurs/Fri afterschool
 - Working with DPW to coordinate setup of outdoors tents mid-March as weather permits

He wanted to address the 1:45 dismissal time; this is in place so teachers can get their prep-time according to their contract.

Chair Green asked for any questions and recognized Ms. Krepchin who asked about the seniors and what they will be doing? Superintendent Skipper stated that there are a number of plans in place to get as many students back as possible. About 100 from the CTE program, athletes, and special education students are all included in the plan. We cannot have walk-in programs. We have to have established lists so we can coordinate the students with the testing this needs to happen ahead of time. The student reps will present tours but most students will stay remote for their classes. The rest of the space is being absorbed by the elementary schools. Mr. Mazza added that during the week of transition Community Schools will provide care at 11 am on those days. Ms. Krepchin also mentioned the performing arts. Are there any plans to bring that back? Superintendent Skipper said that Director Mosby has been in the choir room looking at how they could do practice both inside and outside the school building.

Ms. Pitone asked Mr. Mazza if he could say more about contractual prep-time. During the school year, teachers have prep-time during specialist and we did not have a lot of choices to provide teachers with their prep-time. Right now, it just looks like we are shortening the day for students instead of providing another option for prep-time. Mr. Mazza answered that during a regular school year teachers have their prep-time for 40-45 minutes, as we move toward hybrid and comply with student learning time from DESE we need to make sure we are providing live synchronous learning while keeping staff and students safe. It was an easy decision to keep our specialist remote, they will be

providing that specialist time to students that are remote, and they will be giving that synchronous time to students who are remaining remote. It is important for teachers to prepare lessons and units during their prep-time. Stopping the instructional day at 1:45 pm provides students with five hours of in person instruction each day and teachers will have enough time to prepare for the following day or the following week. It is also a coverage issue, trying to find support in the building, keeping teachers going in and out of the classrooms to a minimum. Therefore, the 1:45 stop time was reasonable for us as a district; it gives students the in-person learning time they need and gives the teachers time to plan.

Ms. Barish asked how the district could support families who have children in two different schools being dismissed at 1:45 pm? Mr. Mazza answered that they are looking at how they can create a safe space for children to wait while parents are picking them up at two schools and will share their progress. Superintendent Skipper added that we would find spaces outside as best as we can and we hope parents will try to be there as soon as they can after school especially in inclement weather since we do not have a lot of space indoors.

Ms. Barish asked about high school learning labs and if the public understands what they are. Superintendent Skipper answered that this is based on the houses and the students who are struggling with remote learning. They will work with families to identify who those students are and offer a supervised place which will be media center areas within the houses to be able to bring the students in so they have a supervised place. We hope to bring some tutoring in to offer academic support. Giving students a place to work, houses will look for about 20-30 students to begin and if there are more students that need the support we will split the time we could also put tents up or put the students in other locations.

Dr. Phillips said she had some logistical questions about Community schools. First seeking confirmation on the start and end times. Second, how are the Winter Hill and Healey students who are attending at the high school, getting to the Community Schools program? Lastly, has any communication gone out to parents who unenrolled from Community Schools earlier in the year or families that never enrolled, to let them know that they are going back in person? Superintendent Skipper answered that with the bus company to do the loop back to the Community Schools in the afternoon. Also, to have the students walk based on the weather with the students. For timing they are working with Community Schools to keep as close to the 1:45 pm time as possible to get the students there. Rosanna Paribello, Director of Community Schools will be going through the lists to see if anyone wants to join the program.

Ms. Pitone went back to the information about DESE and wanted to know about the six foot compared to three-foot distance and the city ordinance that says it has to be six feet. Superintendent Skipper said she does not have an answer right now but will gather information and bring it to the next meeting. They did map out the classrooms in the fall so they will go back and do that again. Ms. Pitone said it's important for people to understand the difference and appreciates the Superintendent looking into it.

Superintendent Skipper asked Karen Woods, Director of Educator Development and Gretchen Brion-Meisels, who is on the faculty at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a parent in Somerville who has been working with both high school students and educators through a joint initiative between her class and Somerville based around these critical participatory research projects, to come and talk about a research project that they intend to go forward with.

Gretchen said that they are engaged with a number of teachers in SPS, it is part of a professional development project through Karen Wood's office, where teachers are getting professional development credits for engaging in a course with her students at the Harvard Graduate School of Education that focuses on Critical Participatory Action Research. The purpose of the project is to allow teachers and students to get insight into research methods and study design and to investigate a question that is relevant or of interest to their community. The study in your packets this evening, is a proposal put together by a handful of teachers across the district who want to understand how different stakeholders in the district are experiencing the school placement and choice process both including the kindergarten school placement process but also the transitions between schools or programs and proposing to talk to school leaders, family liaisons and parents about how they perceive that process.

Karen Woods added that this is the second year that we had teachers participate as part of professional development. The teachers involved found it to be a very robust and fulfilling learning experience and thanked Gretchen for this wonderful learning experience.

Superintendent Skipper said this is just information for everyone and thanked Gretchen and her staff and looked forward to working with her in the future.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Krepchin read the guideline for public comment and invited those who signed up to comment to do so in the order called.

Anna Seebler, 4 Gibbons Street, a ninth grader at Somerville High School.

Before the pandemic, she was a motivated student who loved school but after being isolated for a year, she is feeling empty and lonely. When I saw the reopening plan, I saw that the city does not even have the majority of high schoolers even considered to go back. I feel abandoned by the city and completely forgotten. I have tried every opportunity this year to connect on remote learning. I turned my camera on, I participated, I joined clubs and now sports and have attended extra meetings to get to know my peers and teachers. I feel removed from the rest of the world and like a large percent of my identity has been lost. I stare at black screens every day and barely any other kids in my class turn their cameras on or talk to me. I think it's important for the city to remember that depression, anxiety, suicide and other mental health issue are much more prevalent in teens especially during this pandemic we are at greatest risk. The only way to fix this is to see actual human faces before the end of the year. Somerville claims they want to help all students but they are ignoring high schoolers and damaging their mental health. I don't see why Somerville waited so long for a return plan and then left out an entire section of our city. I am begging you to let us go back to school before the year ends and recognize the significant damage to our mental health online school has brought.

Rachael Evans - has been a resident of Somerville for over 30 years. She has two students at Somerville High School, one is fine and one clearly is not. As you know we are a diverse city, racially, economically and socially diverse but these students also have diverse learning abilities. Some students manage fine with remote learning and some suffer terribly. Our teachers are doing a terrific job under the circumstances. Families have been doing an amazing job under very difficult conditions. The pandemic has evolved over the past year and our school system has not adapted appropriately. The current reopening plan is based on fear rather than science. The current reopening plan fails to address the needs of all students. Especially the diverse needs of high school students. If you were to propose in-person learning to all high school students tomorrow, some would say yes and others would prefer Remote learning. That is the hybrid plan we had on the table last fall. The state is now telling you to open schools to in-person learning, this does not require students to return to in-person learning. But it demands you give them that option, some students desperately need that option. I beg you not to ask for a waiver of the state requirement. Somerville has been acting on the demands of the teachers union and I ask you to make in-person learning a priority. Students need that option now, not September, now. It is shocking to hear Mr. Mazza talks about the social-emotional needs of Pre-K students while ignoring those needs of high school students. Please offer in-person learning for all high school students.

Jeremy Brown reading a letter from another Somerville parent:

Dear School Committee, I am the parent of a high school student and am writing anonymously to protect my child's privacy. He has been attending Somerville schools for over 12 years since the wonderful pre-school at Capuano. His teachers and administrators have always shown dedication and commitment to his educational and social well-being but now seem at a complete loss. My student is very bright and has always received A's and B's until this year. He is now flunking out of high school. He has always found classes and homework challenging but he has been unable to adapt to remote learning. This happy social kid has now fallen into severe depression. When we reach out to his teachers and administrators they shrug and point out that a large proportion of high school students are struggling, many students are missing classes and many students are failing. If my student represents the new normal, what are we doing to address it? On my students last report card he received a failing grade in every class except for what is known as remote study which is held on asynchronous Wednesdays where six of his teachers told him he was failing because he has not been doing the work. However, in his remote learning class, not only did he receive a passing grade but they also commented that he was a pleasure to have in class. This is a complete lie, because

when asynchronous meets, there is no class. My high schoolers report card has been falsified; he has not attended classes in almost three months however, you may not know this because the high school marks him present every Wednesday. Does anyone have this data, has it been sorted between truth and fiction. Asynchronous school is total fiction. You have paid so much attention to the public health crisis caused by Covid but paid no attention to the mental health crisis caused by remote school. The teachers union is demanding to protect their physical health but who is protecting our student's mental health. Do you know how many high school students are currently failing? Do you know how many high school students have given up on remote classes? Have you evaluated the impact of remote school on teenagers? My student is not failing school, school is failing my student. Next September is too late. We urge the School Committee and the administration to develop a plan to bring back students this year.

Lauren Hanley spoke about adolescence. Our young adults will be out in the world before we know it. This is a group of 1200 students who have been forgotten. How is it that we are centering equity in this city but 1200 students were abandoned? How do we know how many students wish to return to the building when no surveys have been done? Assumptions that it cannot be done continue to be made in the absence of data from the actual families. Please ask families what they want so you can make an assessment of space so that those students who actually want to return can do so. Urgently negotiate with the SEU so that teachers can teach in person before it's too late. Many students will go out into the world without the skills they need or the required hours of their trade or unprepared for college and many of whom have decided not to go to college. Many are isolated, depressed, anxious and barely functioning.

Many of whom are not returning to Somerville High because they dropped out, some are in therapy programs and simply cannot concurrently attend school. I have several data points about eating disorders, psychiatric emergencies, substance abuse and suicides but I will add them in my written comments for lack of time. Two weeks ago, Mayor Curtatone said he had access to additional mods; real estate is what is keeping our kids out of school. Access the mods so our high school students can get back to actual school, why would we not put the mods at the elementary schools to be more inclusive and more equitable to all of our students. When will the high school students be back in their actual in person learning environments they are anxious and want to know now? For almost a year ago Mayor Curtatone said we are guided by a north star, well that north star is our students it is not politics, it is not finger pointing and it is not fear. The School Committee has the ability to right these wrongs. Please listen to the science that was presented at DESE last Friday, please do not ask for a waiver. The data is abundantly clear and we are doing serious harm every day we are closed. Please let our children's health and safety be your north star.

Neva Duran - 17 Kingston Street (Comments submitted to be included in these minutes, added as an attachment below)

Fredo Durand - father of a first grader at Kennedy he is asking the district and the School Committee for an assessment of the learning gains or losses over the last 12 months. We know that summer vacation often results in months of learning loss and such losses disproportionately impact low income families. What is the impact of one year of school closings in Somerville. I hear from other parents that some teachers say they are six months behind and report cards that say not applicable for 90% of math and hear of students who read at a level they should have had six months ago. Do we believe the children have learned 100% as much in a one year period of remote learning as they would have learned in a regular in-person 12 month period, 80%, 50%, what do teachers think? How many students are below grade level in math and reading compared to a regular year, we need to know. Finally on behalf of Somerville Parentsfor Equitable Re-Openings he would like to invite you to the rally for re-opening at 1:15 pm at Somerville High School. Join us for a masked, distanced rally to bring all Somerville students back to their classrooms. Bring signs and wear red for re-opening. We will hear from a parent of a special needs student, a high school student and a member of the latino community. We will also be offering student and family portraits all are welcome including children. We hope to provide translation in Spanish and Portuguese and if you miss it, it will be broadcast on Facebook live. See you all on Saturday.

Gabrielle Jaquet - This evening she comes to you as a physician and a public health official. As you are aware on February 14th a letter was sent to Commissioner Reilly stating that the June 2020 guidelines were more appropriate for guiding Massachusetts particularly in regards to distancing between students and that opening schools to in-person learning should reflect within school transmissions rather than community covid prevalence rates. This letter has now been signed by over 300 Massachusetts physicians and scientists and urges them to use the best data in Massachusetts. Which is what she recommends we use tonight. Why did the CDC recommend the six feet distancing rule? Because as a country we have variable compliance when it comes to mask wearing and

other productive measures. Using the CDC guide Massachusetts has done well. Massachusetts has implemented broad active mitigation measures in its schools across the state and with DES's guidance for the current academic year districts have implemented in-person learning with a range of protective steps. By using this multi-layered infection control approach, school districts across Massachusetts safely remained open for in-person learning with very rare instances of in school transmission. This has occurred even with community prevalence rates significantly higher than those set forth by CDC. The CDC itself released a study showing the community spread is not an indicator with in school transmission. Mitigation can keep the schools at much lower risk than other locations. In a recent study in a peer review journal there was no substantial difference in cases in students or staff having a three or six foot distance between them since schools opened in the fall. Closer spacing only fails when all the other mitigation pieces are not in place. This data mirrors that from other states and countries. The data from indirect impact from Covid are now available. What we have seen is that the risks to students not in school are dramatic. Students are more isolated, suffer more mental and physical health concerns including trauma, suicide and learning loss. In medicine we use the best scientific data and evidence to form a standard of care and this is what Somerville needs, a standard of care. I ask that we do not ask for a waiver and get our students back to school.

Elizabeth Caffrey- 71 Alpine Street agrees that most of the decisions on how to run the district should be done locally however at this juncture Somerville has lost its credibility in the eyes of many to maintain that control. This opinion is because of parents having to complain about IEP's which triggered an audit. That parents had to complain about severe underreporting and blatant lies to DESE about learning hours which triggered schedule changes. It's based on the fact that there is no plan for assessing learning losses or gains, the fact that the minutes of these meetings are nowhere to be found and in violation of open meeting law. Somerville is an example of why DESE has to step in and force districts in-person now. Our students deserve much better than Somerville has provided. I supported DESE and I am not in support of DESE granting them a waiver. Somerville is not unique, Somerville's leaders have had many missteps over the years. Rich Raiche just now stated that the building delays now are the result of deferred maintenance. The buildings aren't opening now. Whose job was it to see that Honeywell maintained the buildings, why are they not being held accountable now? The building status is not our students fault, it is not because of Covid. You just changed the Pre-K-K schedule two days after it was emailed out. You don't deserve a waiver. Our kids deserve their legal access to an in-person education. You have wasted too much time. Our plan B could have been implemented months ago. Without legal action or monetary consequences I shudder to think how long it will take to get our students back to full time in-person learning. Happy International Women's day to all the SPS moms who had to give up their jobs or go part-time to facilitate remote learning.

Ellie Koczela - 84 Bay State Ave She has a son who graduated last year and a daughter who is a freshman and she is a teacher at Atrium in Watertown. Atrium has been open for in person learning since September. Atrium has experienced one case of Covid and one pod in one grade had to close for two weeks. She has a third child not in the SPS but in the Friends School in Cambridge. Friends has been open since September and has had two cases of Covid shutting down the affected grades for two weeks. As a teacher she understands why Somerville faculty are afraid to return. She felt the same way in September. It was hard to imagine teaching while enforcing social distance, how could I keep my students safe and how could I keep my household safe for my students. We taught in January with the windows wide open. As with any fear I feel quite different now my colleagues have spent six months sharing spaces with them and now they also feel quite differently. We teach with the windows open standing in front of my student wearing the most heavy duty winter jacket I own. We eat snacks and lunch outside, rain or shine, snow, ice, whatever. I have reminded students hundreds of times to wash their hands, not to touch each other that they can't share materials, that they can not eat in class, every day. She teaches simultaneously in person and remote learners every day. But we are fine, Covid has not spread. Some here tonight will testify that in person learning is safe. Others will testify to the numerous dangers children face every day by not returning to school. she is here to tell you that this fear will fade in time. Her daughter has been in her room staring at the screen for seven hours a day for a year. She is asking the teachers to step up, in person teaching is possible, please open the schools immediately.

Beatriz Gomez - 17 Dexter Avenue As the Somerville Public Schools and School Committee discuss the return of high school students to in person learning, she would like to point out one of the inequities the CDC points out is putting racial and ethnic minority groups at greater increase risk of getting sick and dying from Covid. Access to high quality education. Inequities in access to high quality education for these minority groups can lead to lower high school completion rates and barriers to entrance to college and may limit more job options and lead to lower paying jobs and less stable jobs. People in these situations often cannot afford to miss work, even if they are sick, because

they do not have enough money put aside for essential items like food and other living needs. High school is not just about socialization and prom, it's about preparing our youth for their future opportunities and the standard of living that comes with those opportunities. A high school dropout will earn \$200,000 less than a high school graduate over their life and almost a million dollars less than a college graduate, that's all of you listening right now. So how is the city impacting our high school students by not giving them an in person education. What is happening to students who struggle in a regular environment, what is happening to students who come from limited backgrounds and have limited resources at home. Are we willing to give these students the tools to succeed in the future? Nationwide 54% of students who dropout of high school do so in the tenth and eleventh grade, is bringing back seniors enough? Will some students who get into college eventually dropout because they were unprepared or have we already lost these students and forced them into an economic struggle for the rest of their lives? Will they be the victims of the next pandemic? The future of our youth is in your hands, those with limited means need the tools to succeed. Without a high quality education we are perpetrating the same systemic racist factors that put certain communities at higher risk during this pandemic.

Caitrin McDonald - 47 Madison Street She is the mother of two ninth grade students and a fifth grader at ESCS. She speaks feeling dismayed that it has been a year since children have been inside of a school and that the science continues to be politicized and that our children are the pawns in this game. Today her son's turned 15 years old and have had no contact with their peers outside of hockey since last March. They are isolated and have yet to meet a single classmate in high school, they do not know the faces of their classmates, only their names and some of their voices and associated black screens. General education for high school students was not included as a group in the reopening plan but I hope you have become more aware, they are the group that is suffering in increasing numbers. Socializing and having contact with their peers is profoundly important for their social and emotional growth. They need to be included for the plan for this year because loss of education time impacts them in much more tangible ways than many of our younger students. The district has not only ignored some of our older students but has not addressed the needs of our disabled students. They are not in compliance with IEP requirements, are breaking the law and are in violation of the law and creating civil rights violations for people with disabilities. I've heard members of our community say that they didn't sign up for this, well none of us signed for this but it is our job to rise up to the needs of this moment. Tonight I ask two things, do not ask for a waiver for K-5 and get kids back in school to level the playing field. In the next two weeks please make a plan for the high school students to return.

Kate Riley - 21 Dartmouth Street #1 (Comment submitted to be included in these minutes)

Erich Ludwig - 36 Berkeley Street He has lived in Somerville since 1999 and has a second grader and one in kindergarten in the fall. He urges you to let anyone who has a child to let them return to full day in person learning as soon as we can. He asks that the School Committee not ask for a waiver from DESE. He has many questions and knows he is not the only one, how many teachers have applied for variances not to return to the classroom, how is that spread across the grades and the schools? How many grades and classes have been below the DESE mandated hours of instruction during this remote period? For those classes that were, was this a conscious decision between teachers and administrators, can those hours be made up and how, when, why is he getting a more comprehensive survey about my thoughts and desires to return to school from the Massachusetts PTA than my own district. Why is the district not polling parents to get information about who wants to return and under what conditions? I heard some speakers talk about a fear to return and how it impacts a certain demographic profile. But without data we can't actually act on these fears we can't understand if they are real. The district should have been polling parents after these meetings. We should be polling parents before we finish negotiations with the union so that that information only family preference can be included in the bargaining. How can we ask how many students a building can hold if we don't know the number of students returning. What's our plan for learning loss, mental and emotional needs of students upon their return? Why aren't we seeing more outreach to families who speak Haitian, Portugues and Spanish. We live in a district with 40% Hispanic students and a large population of Portugues and Creole I'd expect to see more. Why do we have all these questions is a series of cascading effects. Communication has been so poor there are lots of rumors flying around. The parents have to figure out what's going on. This lack of clarity impacts our jobs, our children and our desire to be part of this school system.

Sangwa Hong - 24 Liberty Ave She would like to address the potential financial risks to the city. She does not have students with special needs or IEP's but based on what she has heard the city's exposure on this front is significant and continues to grow. Assessments for IEP's have not been performed, discussions about compensatory

services have been pushed off. All this is clearly contrary to applicable laws and guidelines. In Somerville every day thousands of kids are accumulating needs of educational services, including compensatory services that the district is required, by law, to provide and no one has any idea how much it will end up costing the city. Not to mention the legal claims and the costs for defending against them. On top of all this if the city receives this waiver from DESE they will have to pay for and provide hours of education hours they will have to make up. All of this is happening largely because we are basing what science said from a year ago, much more scientific progress has been made and here we are still stuck in the confines and boundaries of the days when people were wiping down bananas with coax wipes. What is the cost of being stuck, yes, kids are suffering, stressed out families are now facing awful choices because the hybrid schedule is terrible. It is inequitable and it's rejection was inevitable and now it has been struck down by the state for good reason. Besides all these other reasons, have you considered that every day that Somerville refuses to move forward in step with science, then it's just another day for the kids to hope for educational services and regress and will require hundreds if not millions of dollars to address. If you think that's not your problem, we as taxpayers have to take on all those problems.

Ashraf Hegazy 83 Willow Ave - stated that he understands the frustration coming from the parents of students wishing to return to full day in person learning but that no one has heard from parents who have immunocompromised children. He is the father of a student who has been in full quarantine for thirteen months because he is immunocompromised. Right now all he has for any social or emotional interaction is with the students and teachers he has had since remote learning started. He has built relationships with both his peers and his teachers. Now the city wants to change his learning environment, giving him new teachers and classmates, and he feels it will be detrimental to his learning and emotional health. He asks that the city re-consider and leave these children in the environment they have become used to until in person learning can become safe and secure for them.

Julie Allen teaches 6th grade ESCS in the Unidos program. She would like to speak in favor of the changes proposed to the Unidos enrollment process. She has been teaching in the program for the past eight years and has seen how the demographics have changed in the bilingual buckets. If you look at 7th and 8th grade compared to 1st and 2nd. These shifts see more English dominant students in each class. The linguistic demographics are almost completely different. Our Spanish dominant families cannot get into the program and the intent was foster bilingual development for Spanish speakers. If that isn't enough to vote in favor then also think about the fact that none can learn Spanish in a class that is over half native English speakers. It is not how an immersion program works. English is already favored by students, since this is the case all students need to read, write, speak and learn in Spanish so all students can receive an equitable education in both languages.

Ali Contini-Field is a parent of a first grader at WHCIS and a potential Smile student in the fall. She thinks that the city needs to go with the three foot distance for students. She would like to get all these students back to in person learning and for any of the students who want to stay home can do so. She asks that the city not spend any more time re-hashing the hybrid model and just get the students back to school.

Kelle Glajch - 7 Berkley Street She wants to fully support the in person five day learning for all students. She hopes the School Committee will not ask for a waiver and just gets the students back to school. She is a strong believer in public education and has many teachers in her family but after watching how this year has unfolded she has put a deposit down for her child to go to a private school in the fall. She is hoping that this will not have to be the case and she knows that there are many other parents out there who are considering the same thing. But then there are the parents who cannot afford any alternatives for their children and she also wants the School Committee to remember them when they are making their decision for next school year. She asks them to please not consider getting a waiver and go with the decision DESE made for five day in person learning.

Ksenia Samokhvalora - 60 Irving Street (Comment submitted to be included in these minutes)

Paula Magneli - is a native of Argentina and has been parent and PTA officer for many years at ESCS. She asks that the School Committee gives more time and consideration to the Unidos proposal. It has not been widely circulated and has not yet been translated. We have many questions and can see how many get confused between Spanish speakers with English language learners who often do not intersect. According to DESE an ELL student is one that does not speak English or whose native language is not English and who cannot perform class work in English. Most students from Spanish speaking families enter Unidos with fluent English so many students will be

discriminated against by using an English assessment only. We are also concerned with the change of goals as it was presented. Every Hispanic family wants to give their children a chance to maintain and formalize the Spanish language and culture. No matter our background, we know our children have an edge because they are bicultural. When they also become bi-fluent they have another natural advantage. We want Spanish to be a conduit to English, we want a high quality rigorous two way multilingual program. Your plan was presented with good intentions for equity but Unidos should give priority to Spanish speakers in order to have a more equitable program, they should not have to compete against English speaking students for a seat.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- A. August 31, 2020
- B. September 14, 2020
- C. September 21, 2020

MOTION: There was a motion by Ms. Krepchin, seconded by Dr. Ackman to approve the above mentioned minutes. The motion was approved via roll call.

VI. Report of the Superintendent

A. District Report

- Reopening Update
- 2021-2022 School Year Calendar (Mr. Mazza)
- Revised Non- Discrimination Statement Memo (Ms. Doncaster) (out of order)
- 9th Grade Placement Guidelines (Mr. Iwasaki)
- CPAR Project Memo

Superintendent Skipper mentioned that Dr. Davila wanted to share that surveys are not the only instrument used for initial outreach with the parents, on the multilingual side they are making individual phone calls to the parents.

Dr. Davila stated that the individual calls are being made so that families can understand the protocols and expectations for phases 2A and 2B, also transportation to be considered and the baseline testing. They are gathering information and that the SEI1 group are very anxious to come back to school.

Superintendent Skipper also mentioned that any student who wants to remain full remote can also do so. They are looking at the situation and figuring out how best to accommodate that student with the least disruption, in consultation with the parent.

Superintendent Skipper introduced Ms. Doncaster, Director of Student Services as part of the ongoing tier focused monitoring that we have DESE asked that the district take a look at it's non discrimination statement, which all districts have, also posted on our website and our job descriptions. So they have gone ahead and changed the statement and wanted to make the School Committee aware of the statement. Wherever it is printed now it will be updated, we have expanded the phrase to make it more modern and more encompassing and matches up more with our non-discrimination statement. She has a copy there tonight for informational purposes for the School Committee.

Superintendent Skipper wanted Ms. Christine Trevesone, Director of Special Education to come on to explain the coordinated program called Tiered Focus Monitoring. It is a review done every three years through the entire state. There are targeted areas and DESE broke it down right now it is Special Education, some civil rights and some aspects of student services. Also this time they are also looking at ELL. In two more years they will come back with a heavy emphasis on civil rights. This is something ongoing and DESE will be in the district this week looking at Special Education. To look at files and do interviews on Friday and also looking at files for ELL. We look forward to it and learn from it and look at some areas of improvement.

Chair Green answered that our harassment policies are up for review with the rules committee this year, so he sees no reason why they can't add on those policies as well.

Superintendent Skipper added that this is something DESE looks for and Ms. Barish is doing a wonderful job with the rules committee on going through the policies and looking for updates. One from last year is the MOU relative to SRO and the MOU's in regards or in partnership with the Middlesex District Attorney's office.

Asst. Superintendent Mazza presented the school calendar for next year, the Pre-K and K students would start on September 9th instead of September 7th to avoid starting on Rosh Hashanah in deference to the Jewish Community so these students would start and they have to take time off for their high holidays.

Motion: To accept the revised version of the **2021-2022 School Calendar** with the Pre-K and K students would start on September 9th and not September 7th (motioned approved by roll call)

Ms. Barish asked if the Superintendent could speak about the safety officers along the routes that children are taking to get to the high school, also about traffic management around the high school? Is there a parking plan for teachers at the high school who have to drive from school to school during the day?

Superintendent Skipper answered that Ms. Doncaster is the one that is spearheading the traffic patterning as well as officers from traffic & parking and as the phases of students continue to return we will continue to look at the traffic patterns and how they can be improved. SPD has done a terrific job up there with traffic management where we have a pull in for the buses and vans and the same with the Brown at the other end of the building. We have to keep making adjustments as more students return. Parking is a challenge, high school staff come in earlier than some of the other staff. Parking is a real difficulty especially when the high school returns to the high school but for now it is through traffic but SPD has been especially helpful with the issues we have had to face.

Mayor Curtatone said we have a ways to go, right now we are dealing with major construction of the high school and construction of the green line at the bottom of School Street. Along those lines we will be monitoring and managing the parking situation to see how we can do things better like letting students take public transportation for free and other measures to still think it was the right thing to not to spend hundreds of millions of dollars for a parking structure under the high school. He thinks that over time it will work out well.

SuperintendentSkipper said they already have working buses to go to and from the high school.

That concludes the Superintendent Report.

B. Personnel Report

VII. REPORT OF SUBCOMMITTEES

A. School Committee Meeting for Educational Programs and Instruction: December 14, 2020

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Educational Programs and Instruction of December 14, 2020.

B. School Committee Meeting for Rules Management: January 20, 2021 (Ms. Barish)

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Rules Management of January 20,

2021. **C. School Committee Meeting for Educational Programs and Instruction:** January 27, 2021 (Dr. Phillips) MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Educational

Programs and Instruction of January 27, 2021.

D. School Committee Meeting for Finance and Facilities of the Whole: February 3, 2021 (Ms. Krepchin) MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Finance and Facilities of the Whole of February 3, 2021.

E. School Committee Meeting for Rules Management: February 8, 2021 (Ms. Barish) MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Rules Management of February 8, 2021. **E. School Committee Meeting for Educational Programs and**

Instruction: February 22, 2021 (Dr. Phillips)

MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Educational Programs and Instruction of February 22, 2021.

F. School Committee Meeting for Finance and Facilities of the Whole: February 24, 2021 (Ms. Krepchin) MOTION: To accept the report of the School Committee Meeting for Finance and Facilities of the Whole of February 26, 2021.

MOTION: There was a motion to suspend the rules and accept all subcommittee reports by Dr. Ackman second by Ms. Pitone. Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. UNIDOS Enrollment Proposal – Discussion and Vote

Superintendent Skipper introduced Asst. Superintendent Mazza and **Sara Davila, District Administrator of Programs Multilingual Learner Education** who introduced other team members who are studying the Unidos enrollment process. The goal of the program is for multilingual learners to become bilingual, biliterate and bicultural. She has been around since the initiation of the program and it affirms the identities of brown children and gives them a strong foundation. The proposal is to “right the ship”. The first grade class this year is from a majority of English speaking homes. The roots of the program is that bilingual education benefits the second language. This is the most effective way for Spanish speakers to learn English. For the English learners to learn Spanish by being immersed in Spanish. We want to change from our current lottery system that has three lotteries embedded in it to two lotteries so the two would be based on English proficiency and English proficiency assessment. We would maintain seats for 70% of those students learning English and they will be very diverse and 30% from English speaking homes who would learn Spanish. The second piece would be to do the Spanish learning assessment after the enrollment. This way we could do a very thorough assessment in order to make instructional groupings and see what support is needed. The last thing we would like to express is that the equity goals that these practices are essential and the support we have we want to go to the most amount of students and who should receive full access to the program they deserve.

Asst. Superintendent Mazza added that when Ms. Davila came to the educational programs in December we asked what trends they were speaking to? The group went back and researched the data and came back as part of their second presentation the data that showed what they were truly speaking of in December. The data speaks to the whole idea of equity in specific programming.

MOTION: Ms. Normand stated that after hearing over the past few years from our educators and the families involved that we are talking about changes that are in line with our equity policy and unless there were some major piece of research that contradicted the motion, then she would have no reason not to vote in favor of the motion presented.

Dr. Phillips said the last time they spoke about Unidos and she gave a very articulate statement about why here, why now? Superintendent Skipper answered that Unidos has come away from its initial intent; it was meant to be a dual emergent program to recruit English speakers. The three buckets don't exist in other immersion programs. At the beginning it didn't have as much direct bearing as it has over the last several years. It has become a barrier to Spanish speakers who know a little English and not the other way around. We have moved away from the intent of the program, it happens in lots of other programs if you don't look at how it is evolving. Part of looking at our programs and policies is to make the changes we need to keep these programs current.

Ms. Barish added that she feels better informed about the commitment to equity involved in serving the students of Somerville. Dr. Davila said they would possibly be better able to serve the incoming students and she wants to know

how close we are to allowing all kindergarten students access to the program? How close are we to the goal? Dr. Davila stated that enrollment this year is really unclear, it would mostly be from families already in the community. The enrollment will affect our SEI program and we are expecting a new wave of students coming from the border who are unaccompanied, and a number of students who are about to come into the US. These students may come to Somerville and as a community we want to be prepared for these incoming students. Ms. Barish added that she wondered how much of an expansion may be needed over the coming years? Dr. Davila said it is a perfect time for a look at the program and see how we can help it grow over the next few years, they have looked at other programs such as one for pre-schools students or one for a mult-lingual hub who has a capacity for more teachers to be available in a multilingual program.

Ms. Pitone added her thanks for the proposal and uncovering the inequities in the program. The School Committee is hearing from the families who feel they have been disenfranchised by the proposal. She is wondering what would happen if they waited a year, would this affect the staff who would be doing all this hard work and then having them wait another year for the program that they think is necessary to the students in our district.

Ms. Krepchin wanted to make sure the audience knew that the School Committee received a letter from the Welcome Project voicing their support of this program. We talked about expanding our Spanish option for English speakers across the district, we also want to talk about expanding a program for English speakers as well.

Chair Green asked if the expansion of Unidos at the ESCS was a possibility? Dr. Davila stated that yes, she does think it is an option at the ESCS but the biggest obstacle to that would be having enough Spanish/English teachers available to maintain the programs hoping to work with Lesley University to recruit teachers. She thinks that there are many facilities and locations we can use to expand the program.

Superintendent Skipper added that the SEI program at the Healey has grown and you have to hire educators that fit in, the multilingual programs are even harder, you have to look at what languages are being taught and how we can get the educators to maintain that.

Dr. Ackman asked if the proposal is passed tonight how will this be communicated to the families? Superintendent Skipper said it will first be communicated to the incoming Kindergarten parents and they would do a broad communication to all Unidos families and continue to explore more as we get into more opportunities for language that are not dual immersion. Dr. Davila said beyond the broadcast of the change there will be individual conversations with families during the English assessment process. At the enrollment center when a home language survey is filled out that triggers the need for an English assessment for any child coming into the schools, after the assessment there is a one on one interview and a one on one conversation with the parent about what the program options are. It is a very personal conversation, when a parent is offered the option of a dual language program, they say sign me up. We would expect with this change the waiting list will be smaller on the English language learner side.

Chair Green says this will be different from the usual mass media communication; it will be a more personal conversation on how this will work.

Dr. Ackman asked if this would only impact the incoming Kindergarten students and Dr. Davila answered yes that would be the case.

MOTION: There was a motion In favor of the new enrollment process for Unidos by Ms. Normand second by Ms. Pitone. Motion carried by roll call

Dr. Ackman asked to have more than two meetings to discuss these issues in future.

XI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Villens of Color Memorialization Project (Chair Green, Dr. Ackman and Mayor Curtatone) **Tabled for further discussion at another meeting**

Both Superintendent Skipper and Dr. Ackman wanted to say that they thought this is a great idea and opportunity for our students to become involved in the process.

B. Resolution in Support of Municipal Wifi (Chair Green)

Chair Green and Ms. Krepchin have supported the idea of Municipal Wifi for some time. Ms. Krepchin will read the proposal (*see below) will be discussed more at the next meeting.

C. Acceptance of FY2021 Grant Funds (Recommended action: approval)

MOTION: To accept the federal entitlement and continuation grants and state continuation grants awarded to the Somerville Public Schools listed below, second by

State Grants

Coronavirus Prevention Fund \$297,050

MOTION:

D. FY21 SCALE/ADP Diploma Request (Recommended action: approval)

Evan Michael Taylor Stoneham, MA

MOTION: by Dr. Achman second by Dr. Phillips motion passed unanimously by roll call. **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	Collin Patterson	Audubon, PA	\$5,000	Somerville High School Robotics Team
I Pad	Joan Kennedy	Concord, MA	\$100.00	Argenziano School
Lenovo Think Pad	Agnew Thomas	Cambridge, MA	\$200.00	Argenziano School

MOTION: (Motion by Dr. Achman was seconded by Ms. Barish , to accept this donation with gratitude. Motion approved unanimously via voice vote.)

X. ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting was adjourned via roll call vote at 8:45 p.m.

Related documents:

Agenda

2020-2021 School Calendar

Submitted by: C. White