

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**Monday, May 1, 2017 – Regular Meeting**

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

**Members present:** Mr. Futrell, Ms. Palmer (7:10 p.m.), Mr. Roix, Ms. O'Sullivan, Ms. Normand, Mr. Green and Ms. Pitone.

**Members absent:** Mayor Curtatone and Alderman White

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Laura Pitone called a Regular Meeting of the School Committee to order in the aldermanic chambers at 7:09 p.m., with a moment of silence and a salute to the flag of the United States of America. Ms. Pitone asked for a roll call, the results of which are as follows: - Present – 6 – Futrell, Roix, O'Sullivan, Normand, White, Green and Pitone and Absent – 3 – Curtatone, Palmer, and White.

Following the roll call, Ms. Pitone made the following announcement:

*I would like to make a brief statement as the Chair of the School Committee. Last Monday night, the School Committee entered a short recess to our meeting to allow parents to ask questions of administration. Unexpectedly, the tone of the conversation shifted in an unfortunate direction resulting in a general disregard for opinions and intentions, in particular those of Somerville Public School administration. I want to apologize to both Assistant Superintendent Dr. McKay and Superintendent Skipper for this. I ask all who enter these Chambers to treat administration and each other with respect, avoid personal attacks, and assume the positive intentions of all regardless of differences in opinion. I am excited as we embark on exploring new methods of public input for the work of the School Committee and have faith that my colleagues and our community will respond with the grace, openness and respect that these Chambers represent. We have much good and challenging work to do in the interest of the students of Somerville, so let's get started.*

**II. STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL**

Student Representative, Dessources Domond was not in attendance this evening.

**III. REPORT OF SUBCOMMITTEES**

**A. School Committee Meeting for Finance & Facilities:** March 29 (Mr. Futrell)

On March 29, the Finance and Facilities subcommittee of the whole met at 8 Bonair Street. The meeting convened at 7:06pm and was attended by myself, Ms. Pitone, Ms. Normand, Mr. Roix, Ms. Palmer, Ms. O'Sullivan, and Mr. Green. Superintendent Skipper and Finance Director Gordon also attended. There were four people in the audience.

On the agenda were several items, including a brief presentation from two SHS seniors on the senior prom, an update on the budget process, and a review of FY18 planning memos from department heads.

Two seniors from SHS student government presented on costs for the senior prom, requesting funds for certain expenses including security and food and a DJ. They explained the tickets for the prom were \$40 and expressed concern that some of their peers wouldn't be able to attend due to cost. After hearing their request, the Superintendent offered to work with the SHS advisor and with the students to better understand their needs and ensure that the event was accessible for our students.

While discussing the budget collaboratives, or the meetings that the district has held with senior leaders in the district to collectively identify resource needs, the Superintendent talked briefly about plans to support our students with autism, and also talked about innovative programs like the Calculus Project, designed to support low income students who have a strong passion for math.

A question was asked about Community Schools and their budget process, noting that we hadn't yet had a discussion on any budgeting for Community Schools. The Superintendent described the affiliation that we have with community schools, and the fact that we don't support it formally. I'll ask the Superintendent to elaborate here if I've described this inaccurately.

The Superintendent also foreshadowed a technology plan for the district, suggesting that we will invest further in 1-1 computers for all students grades 4-12.

Lastly, we decided that we need a playground discussion for both the West and the Brown, which will likely happen this month.

There were no motions made at this meeting, and the next meeting of the Finance & Facilities subcommittee will be Tuesday, May 2, at 8 Bonair Street.

The meeting adjourned at 9:06pm.

MOTION: Mr. Futrell made a motion, seconded by Mr. Green, to accept the report and minutes for the School Committee meeting for Finance & Facilities of March 29, 2017.

The motion was approved via voice vote.

**B. School Committee Meeting for Finance & Facilities: April 4, 2017 (Mr. Futrell)**

On April 4, the Finance and Facilities Subcommittee of the whole met at 8 Bonair Street. The meeting convened at 7:10pm. In attendance were myself, Ms. Pitone, Mr. Green, Ms. Palmer, Ms. O'Sullivan, Ms. Normand, and Mr. Roix. Also in attendance were Superintendent Skipper and Finance Director Gordon.

On the agenda were items including reviewing prom expenses for seniors, review & discuss a budget draft, a fields update, Bill Rolls, and the Expenditure Report.

After further discussion on ticket prices for the prom, the Superintendent explained that certain expenses were not eligible to be funded with school funds, but agreed to continue working with the student government, and that further school committee engagement wasn't required, that the district was committed to ensuring that students who wanted to attend, could attend.

During our review of the budget draft, we discussed the process for any further budget requests that had not been represented through our previous community meetings by each school committee member, by each department in their presentations to the committee, and through the district-led budget collaborative sessions. We noted that any further requirements would be communicated to the Superintendent, and that any final resource requests would come to this meeting tonight.

As a note, we are currently building what will be the Superintendent's budget request that will be presented to the School Committee. After that presentation is finalized, the School Committee still has the opportunity to incorporate further community input, creating the School Committee's budget request that will be presented to the Mayor and the Board of Aldermen.

Lastly, we received a fields update from the Athletic Director and Recreation Director. During this discussion, the overwhelming message articulated in all decisions is that there are not enough fields for our students and the number of sports that our city currently supports. I repeat - for all of the sports that Somerville currently offers, when we maintain our fields in a sustainable way that is appropriate for their grass or artificial turf surface, there are not enough fields. Parents in the city know this well.

Continued offering of the activities currently offered will result in significant overuse and damage to our fields, while use and maintenance of our fields in accordance with best surface practices would require that we discontinue activities that are currently offered.

Specifically impacted by the shortage of fields are our high schoolers, due to the full size requirements of high school sports, and this shortage has resulted in things like the football teams practicing on small fields or the soccer teams practice occurring late in the evening for students who also need to prioritize homework and sleep.

Key issues mentioned in an otherwise detailed update were:

- natural grass fields were still closed as of April 4 due to weather, while synthetic fields opened March 24 (a week and a half at the time of the meeting);
- the Dilboy stadium turf is 3 years past its scheduled replacement;
- the Dilboy Auxiliary is DCR owned and is planned as grass due to its proximity to the river and current environmental guidelines;
- the track has to be replaced and will cost approximately \$1M;
- Lincoln Park is planned to be back online in 2018 and will require close coordination with SPS and Argenziano to stay within usage guidelines;
- and Nunziato will be shut down the summer in order to fix drainage issues, and will be offline for 2-3 years;
- Conway needs renovation;
- and DCR is planning to partially use Draw 7, with natural grass, for outdoor events like concerts.

The Athletic Director committed to notifying the subcommittee at key times, either in the renovation or maintenance cycle for fields or when key decisions come before the Board of Aldermen.

Lastly, we reviewed the expenditure and the bill rolls, approval of which was motioned by Mr. Green and seconded by Mr. Roix, which was passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 9:05pm.

MOTION: Mr. Futrell made a motion, seconded by Ms. Normand, to accept the report and minutes for the School Committee meeting for Finance & Facilities of April 4, 2017.

The motion was approved via voice vote.

MOTION: Mr. Futrell made a motion, seconded by Ms. Normand, to approve the FY17 bill rolls.

The motion was approved via voice vote.

*Mr. Green assumed the Chair so that Ms. Pitone could present her reports from the two Long Range Planning meetings.*

**C. School Committee Meeting for Long Range Planning: April 4, 2017 (Ms. Pitone)**

The School Committee met for Long Range Planning in the Central Office conference room at 8 Bonair Street on April 4, 2017.

Attendees: Steve Roix, Dan Futrell, Lee Palmer, Andre Green, Laura Pitone, Paula O'Sullivan, Carrie Normand, Vince McKay, Mary Skipper

Meeting called to order at 6:20 pm

Discussed status of the proposed Innovation School, Powderhouse Studios.

Following the approval of the innovation plan by the innovation committee on March 9th (7 yes, 3 no), the Superintendent has been investing time into discussions with the STA to negotiate necessary "carve outs" to the STA contract to meet the objectives of the innovation school (working parameters that would be different for Powderhouse studios staff than the STA contract.) This is under the direction of the School Committee, which asked the Superintendent to support the development process of the innovation school with the intention to bring order to bring it to the SC for consideration for adoption by the district.

The plan for Powderhouse studios has been awarded an XQ grant of \$10M given to schools' designs that successfully "rethink high school." If approved by the School Committee, Powderhouse studios would become an Innovation School in the district. During this meeting, School Committee members shared both exciting opportunities associated with the proposed Innovation School and concerns. Important aspects discussed the types of students/educational experience that this school is designed for, what is the financial model (still being outlined), school accountability to the district and SC, and consideration to how it may impact other schools (enrollment, investment). Although the financial model was still under consideration, 15k per student was a placeholder. With a target of 160 kids when fully implemented that could be approximately 2.4 M per year operating costs (not including facility expenses.) The plan includes incremental population growth over time. The long term goal is for inclusion of a very different educational model into the district could impact the district overall through generalization of some appropriate innovations. Committee also discussed that there could be conditions for the approval with reviews over time to determine if expectations being met.

Several members wanted to make sure there was enough time for an open community process to review, including time to promote presentation. The Superintendent will confer with the Chair on a timeline for the community review process.

Laura Pitone adjourned the meeting at 7:00 pm.

MOTION: Ms. Pitone made a motion, seconded by Mr. Futrell, to accept the report and minutes for the School Committee meeting for Long Range Planning of April 4, 2017.

The motion was approved via voice vote.

**A. School Committee Meeting for Long Range Planning: April 13, 2017 (Ms. Pitone)**

The School Committee met for Long Range Planning in the Central Office conference room at 8 Bonair Street on April 13, 2017.

Attendees: Steve Roix, Dan Futrell, Lee Palmer, Andre Green, Laura Pitone, Paula O'Sullivan, Carrie Normand, Vince McKay, Mary Skipper, Jim Hardy (from MASC)

Meeting called to order at 6:05 pm

## Agenda:

1. Presentation/Training/Q&A with the Massachusetts Association of School Committees
2. Prioritization of Long Range Items

MASC Presentation/Training/Q&A: The goal was to refresh the SC understanding of our scope of responsibility, including obligations under open meeting law. Most members are relatively new and there is great interest in enhancing community engagement, but wanted to alignment our collective understanding of how we operate and practice as a SC. We differentiated between personal opinion, representing yourself, versus representing the SC and the necessity to state when you are representing yourself not the SC (i.e. newspaper calls.) "My opinion not the opinion of the SC." Emails to the full SC, or a quorum of the SC (5 people) cannot include opinions or risk deliberation (oral, written or electronic communication on public business among a quorum of a public body), and same with a subcommittee, when the topic is under the jurisdiction (can make decisions or direct administration) of that group. Blogs or email lists are different, as long as a quorum of members do not participate, however there was a question electronic communication not being the ideal mechanism for debate among members and future consideration as to the acknowledged practice.

Members began the discussion of how do we want to work together, or practice or norms beyond the legal obligations, especially that increasing community engagement with the SC has been discussed as a SC goal (not finalized), ideally work as a group. The purpose of Resolutions was considered, as a statement of the SC beliefs that are publicly communicated. The difference between Policy (what and why), owned by the SC and procedure owned by district administration (how.) Procedures cover who, how, when, where, how much which must marry to the policy that outlines what and why.

The importance of the chain of command was discussed, encouraging members to direct constituents to those responsible for an issue or idea versus escalating immediately to the Superintendent or SC. Those responsible for something are generally the best able to address, as well as the importance of respecting staff scope of responsibility. As a member of "management", SC members should be judicious when expressing concerns or complaints about personnel, materials or programs. Bring them forward to the Superintendent, through the Chair, as the SC directs the Superintendent and the Superintendent directs all staff.

School Committee members are interested in more visible tracking of concerns to better understand the status of questions and concerns. The Chair and the Superintendent will discuss mechanisms. There is a desire to have a future discussion regarding best outlets for information and updates, including our committee structure. There was consideration specifically to the role of the Educational Programs subcommittee and the Regular meeting. Consent agendas, or waiving or readings was discussed with regards to regular business, but not decisions made.

Prioritization of Long Range Items: A working document including a list of all potential long range initiatives as well as general concerns of SC members was reviewed briefly and additional items were added by administration. The list did not include current initiatives, and administration offered to create that list to have a complete picture. A plan was made for the Chair and Vice Chair to get together and review and organize the list for a future prioritization activity.

Laura Pitone adjourned the meeting at 8:50 pm

MOTION: Ms. Pitone made a motion, seconded by Ms. Palmer, to accept the report and minutes for the School Committee meeting for Long Rangel Planning of April 13, 2017.

The motion was approved via voice vote.

*Ms. Pitone returned to the chair.*

#### **IV. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT**

##### **A. Personnel Report**

Mrs. Skipper announced the names of the latest staff members to announce their retirements:

- John Welch, Redirect teacher at Winter Hill Community Innovation School, after 33 years
- Betsy Reardon, teacher in the Unidos Program at East Somerville, after 23 years
- Mary Ann Hellen, paraprofessional at the Winter Hill, after 22 years
- Miosotis Pina, teacher in the Unidos Program at East Somerville, after 18 years
- Eileen Aldrich, librarian at Somerville High, after 5 years
- Ana Caldeira, Science teacher at Somerville High, after 29 years.

Ms. Normand asked if the number of retirements and resignations is typical of other years and what the hiring season will look like.

Mrs. Skipper believes this hiring season will be rather slow. It is encouraging, however, to know so many potential employees are interested in our District as evidenced by the number of attendees at our recent Employment Fair!

### **B. District Report**

Mrs. Skipper presented her District Report, as follows:

- Before she shared district highlights and updates, Mrs. Skipper wanted to take a minute to mention an issue that has been in the news and that has been creating concern among suicide prevention experts around the country. Many of you may have seen an article in this weekend's Boston Globe regarding a trending series on Netflix called "13 Reasons Why". The fictional series is based off a young adult novel originally published in 2011, which focuses on a high school student who dies by suicide, leaving behind 13 tapes detailing why she took her own life. The series is graphic and addresses numerous other very challenging topics. Schools across the country have been reporting that students have been watching the series and discussing it. We will be sending out a communication to parents/guardians of students in grades 5-12 to make sure they are aware of this series, and to provide them with some resources that may be helpful to them in discussing it with their children.
- The Highlander FIRST Robotics Team had a whirlwind trip to the World Championships in St. Louis, where they faced off against hundreds of teams from around the world. The Highlanders had an impressive showing against much more experienced teams from around the world! They qualified 16<sup>th</sup> out of 68 in their division after the first two rounds of play. They were eliminated by the 2<sup>nd</sup> seed alliance, but claimed their second "Creativity Award" of the year for their unique climber, competing against 136 teams in two division. Thanks to some very dedicated students, teachers, advisors, and parents, the Highlander Robotics team is poised for great things in years to come as they build on their tremendous success this year, in only their second year competing as a team. Way to go, Highlanders!
- Last Thursday evening, Mrs. Skipper along with several School Committee members, attended the Boston Breakthrough Gala where an announcement was made about their tremendous new partnership with the Somerville Public Schools. This partnership will focus on students who will be first generation college graduates and will begin working with students starting in the seventh grade and follow them throughout their academic career. 97% of students served have historically gone on to four-year colleges and graduated.
- On Thursday, April 27<sup>th</sup>, this very Chamber was packed with young children from pre-K classrooms and childcare centers around the city, celebrating the Week of the Young Child. This year's theme explored "What does it mean to be kind and fair?" We estimate that more than 300 of the city's youngest learners – and their teachers and center directors – were present. It was a phenomenal event that highlighted how ready young children are to explore ... to learn ... and to have a say in the kind of community they live, play and grow up in. There were so many people involved in putting this event together, under the leadership of Lisa Kuh, our director of Early Education, and Nomi Davidson, Director of the SFLC! Thanks to all of the many, many partners and supporters who helped make this event such a success!
- We hope you'll be able to join us in celebrating our students at a variety of events as we close out the 2016-2017 school year. There are many upcoming music events and awards ceremonies, including the following:
  - this Wednesday, May 3<sup>rd</sup> - CTE Vocational Senior Awards Banquet at the SHS Field House starting at 6:00pm
  - the annual Spring String Fling takes place on Thursday, May 4<sup>th</sup> starting at 7:00pm at the SHS Auditorium
  - next Tuesday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, is the SHS STEM Awards Night at the SHS Auditorium starting at 7:00pm
  - on Thursday, May 11<sup>th</sup>, join us at the All-City Middle School Spring Concert, starting at 7:00pm at the SHS Auditorium.

Please check our website calendar of events for a complete list of upcoming school and district events.

- The SFLC invites you to a community presentation by Dr. Richard Weissbourd on Monday, May 8<sup>th</sup>, from 7:00-8:15pm at the ESCS Auditorium. Dr. Weissbourd is a Harvard lecturer and Faculty Director of the Making Caring Common Project. He will discuss "Raising Caring Children in Somerville" and will share research-based strategies for parents and educators to help children learn empathy and to care for others, including those different from them in background and characters.

Dr. McKay provided an update on out of school time:

As reported in several subcommittee reports, out of school time is a significant focus area across the City including Community Cabinet, which includes City Departments, and the By All Means initiative with the leadership of both the Mayor and the Supt.

Middle grades program expansion, as we've reported, has led to a number of new partnerships including Citizen Schools and Breakthrough Greater Boston, and the Calculus Project.

But I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize the work of our own Community Schools program.

Community Schools continues to grow programmatically, and has focused its growth in some important areas...

- Better alignment and support for the academic program
- Embracing students with different learning needs

Latest push:

Improved affordability for Somerville families – thank the Community Cabinet

Community Announcement:

Child care is expensive, and we want the community to know that we hear this concern and are working on long term plan to improve access for all.

Steps we're taking:

- Rate freeze (6 years, no increase)
- Implementation of a new sliding fee scale

**Registration for Returning Students** May 1-May12, 2017

**\$25** nonrefundable registration fee due at time of registration

**Registration for New Students** May 29-June 9, 2017

**\$25** nonrefundable registration fee due at time of registration

Registration fees are not applied to your first week of tuition. Enrollment is on a first come, first serve basis. Space is limited.

**Registration**

**Forms are available on the SPS website, Community Schools main office, and onsite at every CS afterschool program.**

**Please return registration forms and fees to:**

Somerville Community Schools Main Office

167 Holland Street Room 132

Ms. Palmer expressed concerns that some parents, especially those from East Somerville, have had issues getting to Holland Street to file paperwork. Is there a possibility of doing paperwork electronically (email)?

Ms. Pitone requested that the new guidelines please be broadly publicized. Mrs. Skipper assured members that she would work with Ms. Morgan to get this accomplished.

Discussion also included having staff from the SFLC assist Community Schools staff on-site with the application materials. The availability of this assistance should also be widely publicized.

Ms. Palmer asked if the new sliding scale would impact the availability of scholarships and Dr. McKay said the number of scholarships available should be comparable to the numbers in the past.

Ms. Palmer was concerned about their only being a finite amount of money available and the fact that it would eventually run out.

Dr. McKay responded that he thinks the District will be able to accommodate all depending on space and staffing.

Mr. Futrell commended the District for their action in being proactive regarding the Netflix Series.

Mrs. Skipper thanked staff from the Kennedy School for flagging this issue to administration so that action could be taken.

Mr. Green asked if the communication sent regarding this Netflix series could also be sent to School Committee.

Mrs. Skipper responded that Ms. Morgan will include the School Committee when sending.

## **V. NEW BUSINESS**

### **A. North Street development status update**

Ms. Palmer asked if there has been any further development regarding the work being done to allow students who are being relocated from North Street to housing outside of the City to stay in the Somerville Public Schools during this temporary housing situation. Has an MOA been developed yet?

Mrs. Skipper responded that Rich Melillo and Regina Bertholdo made a presentation to the Board of Aldermen last week but we are still trying to process just how many students will be impacted. Following that, there will then be language sent to the School Committee. The renovations to the apartments will be done in two phases over four years.

This item should be placed on the agenda for the June Finance and Facilities meeting.

Ms. Palmer asked if it is legally feasible to allow students to stay without participating in school choice and Mrs. Skipper responded that it is. We would do something similar to what we offer to non-resident children of STA members and Somerville High School seniors who have moved out of the City. Attorney Long will develop a sample procedure.

Ms. Normand informed members that Aldermen Niedergang and Ballantyne are clear on the status and that everyone is in agreement that the kids should stay in Somerville.

#### **B. School Committee Packet Submissions**

Questions regarding the deadline for submitting items for inclusion in the School Committee packet and also the legality of emailing the committee rather than including in the packet.

Something will be written up to guide the process.

#### **VI. ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS**

##### **Ms. Normand**

Reminded members and the audience of two important fundraisers taking place soon:

- The Somerville High School Scholarship Foundation Raffle on May 12<sup>th</sup>
- The PTA Dinner Dance, emceed by Ms. Normand, on May 19<sup>th</sup>

##### **Ms. Palmer**

Asked for an update on prom ticket prices following the students' request for assistance from the School Committee.

Ms. Skipper will check and update

##### **Ms. Pitone**

Asked members to be sure to publicize the Budget Hearing information.

#### **VII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:24 p.m. via voice vote.

#### **RELATED DOCUMENTS:**

1. Agenda
2. The April 2017 Personnel Report
3. STEM Awards Night Invitation Flyer
4. SFLC 's May Calendar of Events