



COVID-19 RESPONSE

Data Report

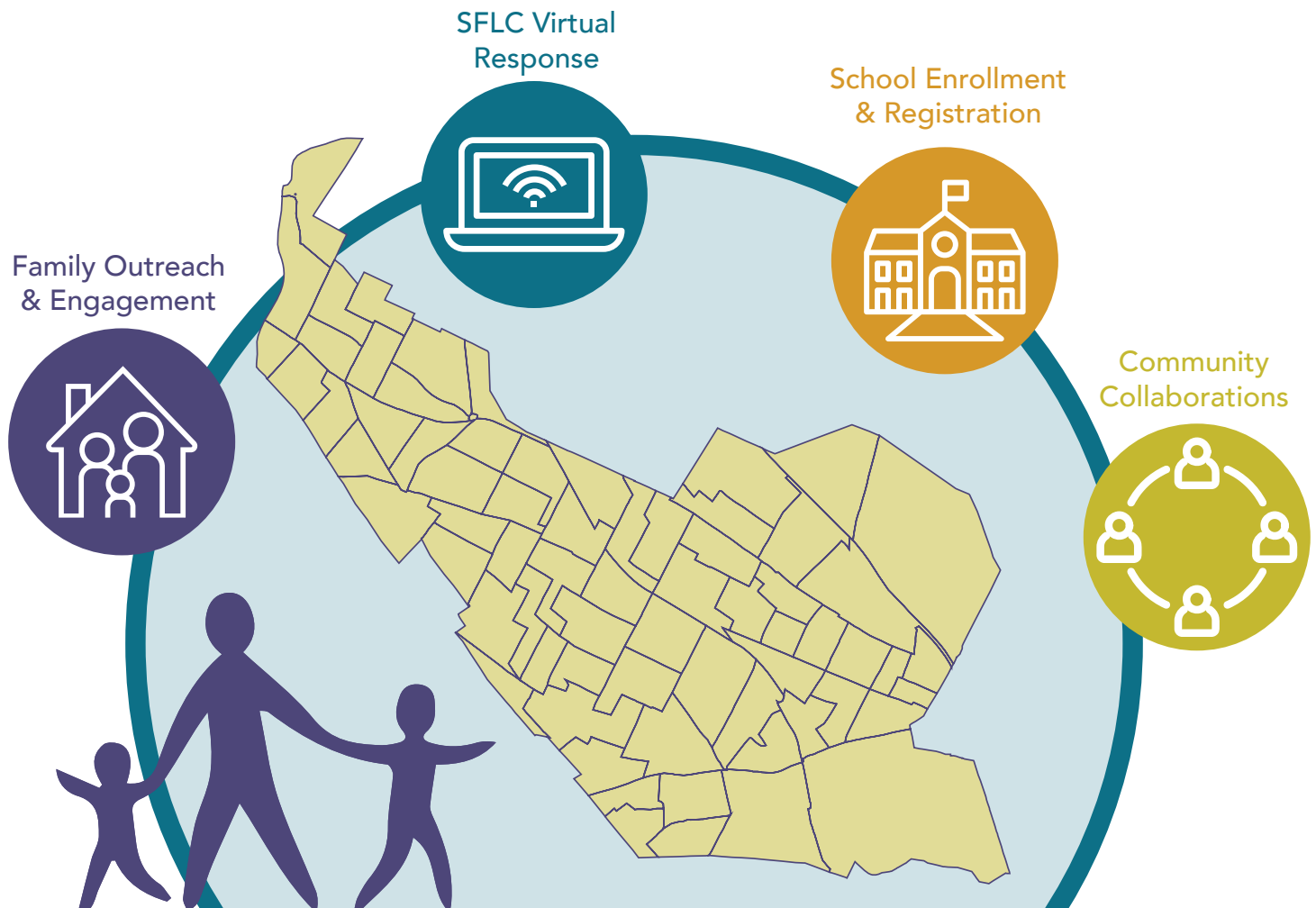
March-June 2020

The Somerville Family Learning Collaborative (SFLC), established in 2011, is the department of family and community engagement of the Somerville Public Schools. The SFLC's mission is "to enhance the capacity of families and schools to support children's learning and well-being by collaborating with community partners and promoting welcoming, responsive schools and programs."

2019-2020 was a year like no other year. In the wake of COVID-19, the SFLC became a critical and indispensable source of family support and stabilization as families' lives were upended and threatened by the virus.

The SFLC's deep-rooted connections and relationships became crucial as the multilingual team was able to quickly reach and support hundreds of families of all cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and help them find their way through the ever changing state and federal guidance about staying safe during the pandemic. This could not have been done without a deep partnership with the City of Somerville and collaboration with a large network of community-based agencies.

This compilation is a report of the incredible impact the SFLC has had in helping Somerville residents stay safe and healthy from March through June of 2020.





FAMILY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT: Basic Needs and Community Resources

SFLC programs staff including SomerBaby, ParentChild+, Playgroups, Parent Support Groups, Basic Needs/Homeless support, Multilingual Services, Volunteer Services, Parent Leaders, School-based Liaisons and Enrollment Specialists were all integral in the department’s efforts to keep families safe and healthy. While communication with families occurred most often through phone calls, staff also used text messages, WhatsApp, emails and FaceTime.

Of the hundreds of families served during this period, 631 high needs, predominantly immigrant families received 3-5 calls per week ranging from 30 minutes to over two hours. Most calls with families included basic needs and emergency benefits counseling with intensive support to complete applications for assistance. The most frequent requests for support were related to food, rent, finances, and internet connectivity. The SFLC staff also connected families to health insurance, unemployment assistance, COVID-19 testing, temporary housing, diaper distribution and more.

As part of their support to families, SFLC staff took a lead role in helping families overcome the digital divide and acquire laptops and internet connectivity through Somerville Public Schools.

This work could not have been done without the immense amount of support the multilingual staff at the SFLC provided to families. The shortage of multilingual staff across the city and district required this part of the team to take on much higher caseloads. SFLC staff worked closely and collaborated with the Immigrant Services Unit (ISU) of the city. All staff took calls from families at all hours, every day of the week to make sure families had everything the SFLC could offer to help them endure the extreme financial and health burdens of the pandemic.

Before the COVID-19 crisis, most SFLC staff did not provide full basic needs and emergency benefits counseling and application completion as part of their work, as they would typically refer these cases to community agencies and the city’s Department of Health and Human Services. However, during the pandemic, nearly all of the SFLC staff took on this role.



Approximately 31 of the 42 Part-Time and Full-Time SFLC Staff conducted regular and intensive case work with families to support them through the COVID-19 crisis.

Multilingual staff were called on most frequently to support families.



FAMILY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT:

Basic Needs and Community Resources

51 families per week **ParentChild+:** Provided weekly phone calls to 51 families to offer basic needs and emergency benefits counseling and support in their home language. Also started providing virtual visits for these families in April.

25 families per week **Parent Support Groups:** A clinical social worker facilitated three virtual support groups per week with approximately 25 families attending each week.

50 families per week **Parent Leaders:** Called 50 families per week that were previously enrolled in SFLC Parent English Classes, or that participated in the EL PAC and IMPACT groups.

110 families per week **Homelessness and Basic Needs:** Basic Needs Coordinator called 110 Homeless families and 60 additional Somerville Public School Families each week.

375 families per week **School-Based Liaisons:** Connected with an average of 375 families per week through individualized communication.

Diaper Distribution: Approximately 88,200 diapers were distributed to Somerville families in collaboration with the Beautiful Stuff Project and Cradles to Crayons.

SomerBaby: Home visitors called and connected with 128 families who had participated in the program to provide basic needs and emergency benefits counseling over the phone in their home language.

Playgroups: Contacted 202 families and connected with 64. Also offered 3 weekly virtual playgroups

Multilingual Services: Translated 141 pages of text and conducted approximately 22 phone interpretations per week in Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, and low-incidence languages.

Volunteer Engagement: Volunteers helped to distribute food (i.e. Grab and Go sites), diapers, books, toys, and toiletries and supported access to remote learning and internet connectivity.

88,200 diapers
March–June

128 families
March–June

202 families
March–June

141 translations
March–June

53 volunteers
March–June



In response to the urgency of COVID-19 related family needs...

The SFLC now has full-time School-Based Liaisons in every school as part of multilingual teams for family outreach, resource and referral, and basic needs and emergency benefits counseling.



The Immigrant Services Unit was created through a collaboration between the city and the school district. A cross-sector team of multilingual staff provided intensive support to hundreds of families in the schools and community at-large.

SFLC VIRTUAL RESPONSE

The SFLC team worked efficiently and effectively to get programming online.



SomerBaby

SomerBaby visits transitioned to phone or video conference check-ins. SomerBaby also supported the distribution of diapers and formula to families in need.



ParentChild+

ParentChild+ Home Visits transitioned to virtual visits and families received intensive basic needs support and emergency benefits counseling from their home visitors.



Parent Support Groups

All support groups transitioned to Zoom and continued to meet weekly. Some parents noted that compared to the in-person groups, the virtual groups have been easier to attend on a regular basis.



Playgroups

Playgroups transitioned to virtual playgroups on Facebook Live and Zoom. Story Time videos in Spanish and Portuguese were shared on Facebook each week. Facebook was also used to disseminate an "at home" curriculum, developmental screening opportunities, and anti-racism and anti-bias materials.



Home-School Communication Support

As school communities transitioned to a plan for remote learning during the extended school closure, all school-based Liaisons and Parent Leaders worked to support families in accessing information and updates from both the city's emergency response efforts as well as SPS district, school and classroom-based communications.



One-on-One Parent Technology Support

The work of school-based Liaisons quickly expanded to include assistance for families supporting students in using virtual platforms such as Zoom and Google Classroom; school-provided Chromebooks and Fire Tablets; and communication applications such as Class Dojo.



School-based Virtual Coffee Hours Support

Many school-based Liaisons helped to support their school's transitions to virtual engagement opportunities. In some cases, virtual attendance was higher than previous in-person opportunities.



Creation of Parent Videos on Internet Access and Use

The SFLC collaborated with community agencies and other departments of the Somerville Public Schools to develop a series of educational videos for parents on accessing and using the internet.

Development of Social Stories

Multilingual social stories that were developed and shared online reached families across the state. The stories addressed topics including school closures, social distancing, how to stay healthy, and coping with a sick caregiver.



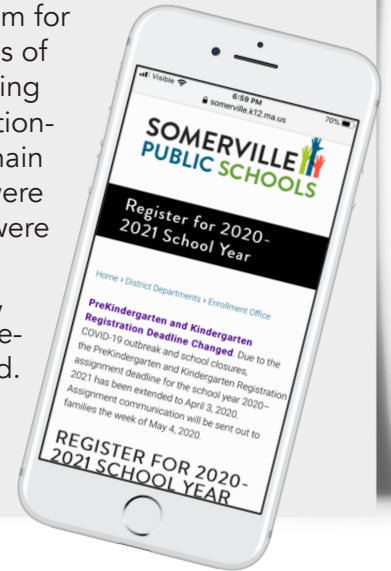
SCHOOL ENROLLMENT & Registration Response



The enrollment team was able to complete the enrollment process for families entirely online by finalizing and using an online registration system that has been in different phases of implementation for the past 5 years. Using this system, the enrollment team processed:

- **168 New Pre-K-12 Registrations**
- **15 Language Assessment Phone Screenings**
- **112 Intra-District Transfers**
- **50 Transfers out of the Capuano School to Grade 1**
- **34 Transfers out of the Brown School to Grade 6**

The enrollment team was able to mitigate barriers such as language and computer access by making personal phone calls and developing a system for parents to send pictures of required documents using their cell phones. Additionally, responses to the main office phone number were uninterrupted as they were forwarded to the SFLC Secretary's cell number, and every call and voice-mail has been answered.



COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, the SFLC team worked across sectors with a variety of city and community agencies and other partners to better support families. The SFLC's partners included:

- **City of Somerville:** Immigrant Services Unit; Office of Housing Stability; Public Health Nurses; Shape Up Somerville; SomerPromise; SomerViva; Somerville Public Libraries
- **Community Partners:** The Beautiful Stuff Project; Brazilian Institute for the Teaching of the Portuguese Language; Brazilian Women's Group; Cambridge Health Alliance; Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS); Connexion Church; Cradles to Crayons; The Diaper Circle; Food for Free; Harvard University Food Services; Local faith leaders; Mutual Aid of Medford and Somerville (MAMAS); Project Bread; Somerville Community Corporation (SCC); The Somerville Community Growing Center; Somerville Emergency Food Pantry; Somerville Food Security Coalition; Somerville Media Center; The Welcome Project; WIC Program
- **Local Business:** Henry Bear's Park (toy packages for 115 children); Porter Square Books (240 books donated)
- **Community Based Child Care:** Early Childhood and Out of School Time Programs; Family Child Care
- **State Agencies:** Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; other local CFCE grantees



Lessons Learned and Next Steps for the Future

It is clear that the COVID-19 crisis is far from over and flexibility will continue to be a necessary component of planning for the future. With that in mind the SFLC will use their experience responding to this crisis to inform their work for the coming year.

- Collaboration with city departments to build shared systems expanded the team's capacity to reach Somerville's highest need families. By leveraging already existing multilingual staff within the city and the schools, capacity to respond to the needs of the community will continue to grow in the coming year.
- The SFLC's ability to be flexible in their work meant that staff were able to quickly and capably take on new responsibilities to respond to the crisis. Staff will maintain this flexibility for at least the next year as crisis response remains a part of the SFLC's role in the district and the community.
- The SFLC's staff diversity was their strongest asset in responding to the crisis as they became the go-to resource for all families, but especially immigrant families who were disproportionately impacted. The ability to be responsive to immediate needs helped the community navigate the disparities caused by racial inequities revealed in the COVID-19 Pandemic. The SFLC will continue to grow in racial awareness, language capacity, and cross-cultural collaboration to strengthen the team over the next year.

