



## **Joint Statement from Mayor Curtatone, Superintendent Skipper, and School Committee Chair Normand regarding the Powderhouse Studios Proposal**

Dear Somerville Community,

Those of us who live and work in Somerville or who are connected to Somerville in some other way, know that we are part of a very special community. A community that embraces diversity and innovation, and one that is collectively committed to supporting our youth as they prepare to become the leaders of our next generation.

Over the last few years, you have heard about the Powderhouse Studios proposal, a creative and innovative concept for a new small project-based school within our district. As a city, we have been excited about the ideas and innovations behind Powderhouse Studios since the first planning committee formed in 2012. A lot of work and a lot of passion on all sides – the project heads, the City, the Schools, the School Committee, and the community – have gone into this school proposal.

We especially appreciate the energy that members of our community have brought to this discussion. We also value the many questions that were raised and the willingness for people to share their hopes, dreams, and concerns regarding this innovative proposal. Please know that we listened carefully and thoughtfully, and considered all comments and recommendations throughout this process and in the many months since this proposal first came forward.

We honor the tremendous amount of work that has gone into the Powderhouse proposal, and the time that the Powderhouse team and the SPS administration have invested in this application process. We especially want to thank Alec Resnick and Shaunalynn Duffy, and others who have been involved in developing this plan, for their vision and commitment to Somerville youth. We also very much appreciate the collaborative work everyone has done over the last five years trying to bring this idea to fruition.

Our decision to not move forward is one of the most difficult ones we have had to face in our respective roles, but we believe it is the right one at this time. As leaders, we have a responsibility to consider all aspects of a proposal that will utilize public dollars and impact our youth. While we believe the concept and plan has many excellent elements – such as project-based learning, computational thinking, interdisciplinary learning, and flexible scheduling – we are also committed to a vision of system-wide excellence and equity that strives to bring such opportunities to *all* Somerville students. These are thus ideas that we continue to actively pursue both within our district and across the city, with the support of teachers, staff, and many local and regional partners.



It has also become clear that, despite several years of work, the Powderhouse Studios innovation plan is missing some critical elements. Many of these issues were raised over the course of the authorization process: clarity of specialized service plans for Special Education or English Learner students; the weighted enrollment algorithm; assuring Massachusetts standards coverage; and full transparency around the lease. Without this critical information, as leaders charged with the educational wellbeing of all Somerville Public School students, we could not recommend authorization.

We are incredibly fortunate to be in a city that values and supports learning and innovation the way that Somerville does. To achieve the greatest success as we pursue this priority, the student equity and financial implications of any new district school must be as closely evaluated as the pedagogy. While many of the concepts that Powderhouse Studios brings to the table are excellent, the expense of the school is equally significant. We weighed all elements of the proposal with equal thoughtfulness and thoroughness. In the end, we could not reconcile the impact that the proposed financial structure of Powderhouse Studios would have on other schools in our district and other programs across the city. In the end, we were unwilling to curb district-wide investments in STEM, innovation, technology, early education, student counseling, or afterschool programming that benefit all Somerville students.

One of the things that we know about this incredible community is that innovation comes not just in how we do things, but in how we work together to resolve differences for the benefit of the community. It is our sincere hope that we can continue to work with Mr. Resnick and Ms. Duffy and their team to bring to fruition the many innovative elements of their proposal in a way that will benefit all of the youth in our community. Through their work at the Healey and in other partnership efforts across the city, we have experienced their creative energy and their commitment to fostering a love of learning through project-based work.

Ultimately, our mission is to enhance student learning, staff development, and collaboration opportunities for our dedicated Somerville teachers and school leaders, as well as to strengthen partnerships and support for all of our schools. This work, already under way with the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, the Barr Foundation, and with the high school building project, is critical to realizing our vision of educational equity for all kids.

We look forward to continuing to work together with our many partners to provide every student in our district and every young person in our community with inspiring learning experiences that will set them on a trajectory of success for the rest of their lives.

Joseph A. Curtatone, Somerville Mayor  
Mary E. Skipper, Somerville Superintendent of Schools  
Carrie Normand, Somerville School Committee Chair