

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**Monday, September 11, 2017 – Regular Meeting**

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

**Members present:** Mr. Futrell, Ms. Palmer, Mr. Roix, Ms. O'Sullivan, Ms. Normand, Alderman White, Mr. Green and Ms. Pitone.

**Members absent:** Mayor Curtatone

Prior to beginning the meeting, Ms. Pitone asked that everyone take a moment to remember the events and victims of 911. It is hard to believe that it has been 16 years since this has happened.

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Laura Pitone called a Regular Meeting of the School Committee to order in the Central Office Conference Room at 7:04 p.m., with a moment of silence and a salute to the flag of the United States of America. Mr. Green asked for a roll call, the results of which are as follows: - Present – 8 – Futrell, Roix, O'Sullivan, Normand, Palmer, White, Green and Pitone and Absent – 1 – Curtatone.

**I. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- August 28, 2017

MOTION: Mr. Green made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roix, to approve the minutes. The motion was approved via voice vote.

**II. REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT**

**A. District Report**

Mrs. Skipper shared her District Report, as follows:

Before I provide an update, I think it's important to reaffirm what we as a district feel is our fundamental obligation to our students and to our families. We have all heard about the recent decision by the current White House administration regarding DACA. There is no question that the impact of this decision, to hundreds of thousands of young people in communities across the country, could be life-changing. I'd like to take a minute to reiterate a message that the Mayor and I shared with our community after this week's announcement.

*September 6, 2017*

*Dear Somerville Public Schools Community,*

*As new information about the future of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program), also known as the Dream Act, makes its way into the homes and businesses in our communities we felt it was important to reaffirm our commitment to every child—and young adult—in our district, regardless of their immigration status, and to reiterate the core values that serve as the foundation of our work in the Somerville Public Schools and the City at large. Yesterday's announcement from the White House regarding the administration's decision to formally end DACA in 6 months may impact an estimated 800,000 young individuals living, contributing, and pursuing their dreams in our communities. Among them are many in Somerville who have known no other home than the United States and now face a very uncertain future.*

*We believe that every child that walks through our doors, and every young adult in our community, has the right to dream. As public educators we have the ethical and legal obligation to provide every student in our district with a high-quality education. As civil servants, we likewise strive to foster a climate of opportunity and respect for all in our community. We embrace the rich diversity – in all its forms – that makes Somerville such an exceptional community, and are fully committed to respecting and celebrating our differences. We believe that every student we serve deserves the opportunity to learn and grow in a safe environment free from fear or persecution. We believe that human dignity is the thread that unites us as a community and makes us stronger.*

*Like these young people pursuing their dreams, we are all dreamers, with hopes and visions for a better future ... for ourselves, for our families, and for our communities. We will continue to fight for*

*human dignity, and for the rights of all who walk through our hallways and, as our neighbors, are woven into the fabric of our community. We will do so regardless of their immigration status, race, color, sex, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identification. It is the just and right thing to do.*

*Our commitment to every one of our students is unwavering. Our commitment to every one of our residents remains resolute. We appreciate your trust and your commitment to Somerville youth and your community, and we assure you that we will continue to do all we can to provide every student in our district with every opportunity to learn, grow, and dream.*

*Sincerely,*

*Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone and Mary Skipper, Superintendent of Schools*

Members expressed their pleasure at the development of this resolution and of the general support that has been demonstrated. Discussion ensued relative to future steps relative to outreach and support.

Mrs. Skipper continued with her report, as follows:

We work with many organizations who are as committed as we are to supporting our students. Among our many long-term partners is **Cradles to Crayons**, who provides support to tens of thousands of students across the Boston area every year. We are incredibly grateful for their very generous donation of 2,000 backpacks filled with school supplies that went to students across the district, PLUS 2,000 brand new books that will be used to help stock classroom libraries at schools across the district.

**Back to School Nights** are going well. Students, teachers, and parents/ guardians are excited about school being back in session! Please check our website Calendar of events for upcoming Back to School Night events.

Somerville High students in the String Orchestra will be getting some extra support through a great partnership between the district's Music Department and the **Boston Chamber Music Society**. Students will be learning from a team of 5 teaching artists from the BCMS, which will provide SHS students with weekly sectional rehearsals starting this month, as well as an opportunity to attend BCMS concerts and open rehearsals free throughout the year, at no cost to students. We're excited about this innovative partnership!

Please mark your calendars for some important district-wide events coming up in the next couple of weeks:

- The annual district-wide **Instrument Rental and Loan programs** are coming up.
  - Instrument Rental is tomorrow, Sept. 12, 3:00-7:30pm at Somerville High
  - Instrument Loan (for qualifying students) is Thursday, Sept. 14, 3:00-7:30pm at Somerville High.Visit the district music page for more details, or contact Rick Saunders with questions.
- The MA Dept. of Public Health in partnership with the Massachusetts PTA and Concussion Legacy Foundation is offering a free **Concussion Awareness Training** in Somerville on Thursday, September 28, 5:30-7:30pm at the East Somerville Community School. To register, please contact our PTA Council President, Mary Lou Carey-Sturniolo at [mmics@aol.com](mailto:mmics@aol.com). We hope you'll come out to get the facts about concussions, learn what to do, and know how and where to get help.

In response to a question asked at a previous meeting, the current number of Out of District students is 84, as of today.

Former Somerville High School teacher, Kevin Dua, now at Cambridge Rindge and Latin, is one of 10 finalists for History Teacher of the Year. Congratulations to Kevin!

Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Almi Abeyta, presented a report providing some information and updates, as follows:

### **Homework Task Force**

The Homework Task Force met most recently on September 7, 2017, to review the following: What data do we need to know regarding homework? And, how do we go about gathering data from multiple stakeholders regarding homework? Thus, we decided that we need to answer the following questions:

1. What is currently required for homework in our schools?
2. What's the purpose of homework as defined by varying stakeholders?
3. Is homework independent work or does it require support from families?
4. How is homework designated time being used in after school programs?
5. Do our students have access (i.e. technology) to complete homework?

### ***Process***

In order to gather the answers to our questions, we decided that we would have focus group meetings with parents/families, teachers and students. Somerville Family Learning Collaborative (SFLC) will organize focus group meetings with parents/families/CPAC and students, and Jackie Lawrence, our STA (Somerville Teachers Association) President, will organize focus groups with teachers. STA will also offer drop-in sessions for teachers. Once we gather our data from the focus groups and drop in sessions, as well as complete an empirical research study, we can analyze the data to make concrete recommendations regarding a homework policy.

Our next meeting is scheduled for October 5, 2017.

### **Accelerated Math Program**

Currently we have 39 students registered for the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Geometry after school pilot course at Somerville High School. We've hired SHS Math teacher who has built the curriculum on the online platform Edgenuity and will lead the program as a content expert. This Wednesday evening in the Somerville High School Auditorium we will host a Family Informational Session, field questions, define expectations, and connect with prospective students and guardians.

### **SHS Headmaster Search**

The consultants will present the process to the School Committee on October 2<sup>nd</sup>.

### **Summer Program Update will be the 25<sup>th</sup>.**

## **III. NEW BUSINESS**

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

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>October 10, 2017</b> | Healey School Grade 6 Students to Windham, NH to attend the Quarrybrook Experiential Education Center. Transportation via bus at approx. \$10 per student per trip. (3 trips in total)   |
| <b>January 18, 2018</b> |  |
| <b>April 5, 2018</b>    |  |
| <b>October 6, 2017</b>  | Next Wave/Full Circle students to Mount Monadnock, NH. Transportation via school van. Cost to students is \$5.00 each.   |
| <b>October 22, 2017</b> | SHS Outdoor Club to Quechee State Park in Hartford, VT to hike. Transportation via school mini-bus with an optional cost of \$5.00 per student with that \$5.00 going to a fund to provide future trip scholarships to students. |
| <b>October 30, 2017</b> | SHS Cosmetology to Rhode Island Convention Center to participate in Beauty Industry seminars. Transportation via bus with a cost of \$20 per student.  |

MOTION: Mr. Green made a motion, seconded by Ms. Palmer, to approve the field trips. The motion was approved via voice vote.

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

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

| <b>Donation</b>                 | <b>Donor</b>        | <b>City, State</b> | <b>Value</b> | <b>Program donated to</b> |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Monetary                        | Arbella Insurance   | Boston, MA         | \$300        | AFA for trip to BSO       |
| 2,000 Backpacks and 2,000 books | Cradles to Crayons  | Brighton, MA       | TBD          | SPS students              |
| School supplies                 | Sarah Dawson        | Somerville, Ma     | \$100        | SPS students              |
| Chairs                          | The Furniture Trust | Boston, MA         | TBD          | Central Office            |

MOTION: Mr. Green made a motion, seconded by Mr. Futrell, to accept the donations, with gratitude. The motion was approved via voice vote.

**C. FY2018 School Committee Salary increases**

Ms. Pitone announced that, at the Mayor's request, the salaries of the School Committee members were increased beginning in the FY18 fiscal year.

President White informed members that these increases were a result of a study by the Municipal Compensation Board who were appointed to study the salaries on non-union staff. Members should have a copy of the study in their emails as Mr. White requested that Tim Snyder send it to all of them.

The School Department's budget should be able to absorb these increases through efficiencies.

No vote was needed.

**D. School Committee Resolution in support of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)**

Maura Mendoza Quiroz, Language and Leadership Liaison, read the proposed resolution aloud to the Committee and audience:

**SOMERVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS****SCHOOL COMMITTEE****RESOLUTION TO AFFIRM SOMERVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS****SUPPORT FOR DACA STUDENTS**

**WHEREAS**, the mission of Somerville Public Schools ("SPS") is to maintain a multicultural school community dedicated to the realization of the full intellectual, physical, social, and emotional potential of all students;

**WHEREAS**, SPS is also committed to providing a safe and welcoming learning environment in order to increase achievement and access for all students irrespective of their immigration status, national origin, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, sex and gender identity, socio-economic status, disability status, or beliefs;

**WHEREAS**, the City is enriched and strengthened by its diverse cultural heritage, multinational population, and welcoming attitude toward newcomers;

**WHEREAS**, education plays a critical role in furthering tolerance, respect, and inclusivity within our society;

**WHEREAS**, the United States Constitution prohibits states from denying students a public elementary or secondary education on account of their immigration status;

**WHEREAS**, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin, among other factors, by public elementary and secondary schools (Title IV) and by recipients of federal financial assistance (Title VI);

**WHEREAS**, recent national political events surrounding the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program have caused some to question whether the United States is still committed to being a welcoming home for immigrants, and

**WHEREAS**, the DACA program is intended to protect access to educational and work opportunities for young students, referred to as DREAMERS, who were brought to the United States before their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday;

**WHEREAS**, these students have been in the United States for many years attending school and working;

**WHEREAS**, there are approximately 800,000 such students in the United States who will be affected by the termination of the DACA program unless the President or Congress takes action to continue it;

**WHEREAS**, it has been reported that of the approximately 800,000 youths attending school or working following approval of their DACA applications, about 65,000 DREAMERS graduate each year from American high schools.

**WHEREAS**, the Somerville Public Schools proudly welcomes DREAMERS and DACA eligible students to enroll in the Somerville Public Schools, as is their constitutional right without regard to their nationality or citizenship, and

**WHEREAS**, many of our children, family members and neighbors are DREAMERS whose presence in our schools enriches the community and broadens the perspectives of all our students and staff

**NOW THEREFORE**, be it resolved that, based on these facts, our shared values, and Somerville's longstanding commitment to equity, inclusiveness, and fundamental fairness manifest in a school system which welcomes all students, regardless of national origin or citizenship, the Somerville School Committee urges its United States Senators Edward Markey and Elizabeth Warren, and United States Representative Michael Capuano, to take all steps necessary to support the continuation of the DACA program, including, but not limited to, sponsoring legislation to do so, thereby assuring that all our neighbors continue to have access to a public education in Somerville and an opportunity to pursue higher education in a university, college or vocational setting.

Following the reading of the resolution, Dr. Sarah Davila, Director of shared the following thoughts on how members of our community have been impacted:

*Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the students, families, and educators who are concerned about the termination of DACA.*

*Those who are eligible for the DACA protections are currently just a small portion of our student body as many of these young people have arrived, integrated into our school community, have graduated from Somerville High School, and are now pursuing college and careers. However, the threats to the DREAMERS is a threat to all immigrant students with a chilling effect on their aspirations.*

*Somerville educators and administrators are working collaboratively and collectively to ensure that our schools and classrooms are and continue to be safe and welcoming. That curriculum and resources match and reflect student needs. That families are informed and are empowered to make decisions in the best interest of their children.*

*To support our families, multilingual resources for immigrant and undocumented families have been carefully selected and vetted by legal partners and are available on the SPS website at [www.somerville.k12.ma.us/onesomerville](http://www.somerville.k12.ma.us/onesomerville)*

*These translated documents are also available in Resource Binders at the schools and at the SFLC. SFLC Liaisons can provide paper versions if on-line access is a barrier for any parent or guardian. The SFLC is actively collaborating with the City (Somerviva, DHS, Human Rights Commission), Somerville Police Department, Harvard Immigrant and Refugee Law Clinic, Greater Boston Legal Services, Cambridge Health Alliance, Kids In Need of Defense, CAAS, **The Welcome Project**, and many other community representatives and volunteers on a regular and ongoing basis as the Somerville Sanctuary City Steering Committee. Together, we have developed a schedule of Know Your Rights information meetings and Legal Clinics that are taking place in the schools, churches, and community centers. Our good partner, The Welcome Project is holding weekly get-togethers with pizza, conversation and support for our immigrant youth most affected.*

*We are grateful for the Somerville School Committee words and actions this evening. Your courage gives us courage as we **all** take an example from our brave students who are the DREAMERS.*

MOTION: Mr. Green made a motion, seconded by Mr. White, to approve the resolution.

MOTION: Ms. Palmer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Green, to amend the resolution to include Governor Baker and Attorney General Healey to the list of officials the resolution is sent to. The resolution should also include the "typical" distribution language that has been used for past resolutions. The motion to accept as amended was approved via voice vote.

The final, amended version will be forward to the Board of Aldermen for their review and consideration.

**IV. ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS****Mr. Futrell**

Where is the line regarding limits on items we are taking a stand on?

Mrs. Skipper responded that this is a School Committee resolution and is within our realm as it impacts the legality regarding educating students.

Mr. Futrell asked why Question 2 was different. Mrs. Skipper responded that it was a ballot question and she was only allowed to provide factual information, no an opinion.

Attorney Long added that in his opinion, student attendance is part of state law and that is why this resolution is within the School Department's realm.

**Ms. Palmer**

Asked about how staff are being supported and guided on how to respond to students over these issues. Mrs. Skipper responded that we are taking a multi-faceted approach and are working closely with the unions.

Ms. Palmer also has an item of New Business for the next meeting agenda. She would like to request to report on a community meeting she sponsored on September 7, 2017 and would like her notes included in the packet for that week.

Ms. Pitone will confer with Mrs. Skipper to determine how best to address and where this fits in.

**Mr. Green**

Rules Management is reviewing the agenda and discussing use of the New Business part of the agenda. They will also be forwarding an amended policy on Public Comment at School Committee meetings to the full committee.

**Ms. Normand**

Met recently with the Clarendon Hill Tenants' Group and they would like us to provide a letter of support for them. Please place on future agenda.

**Ms. Palmer**

Also asked that we hold a reception to honor Kevin Dua. Mrs. Skipper responded that we should let the process play out before that happens and also confer with STA President Lawrence. Ms. Normand added that the work done to qualify Mr. Dua for this award was all done here in Somerville and hoped that any celebration would include students. Mr. Green would like to review how and when we recognize teachers, in general. Discussion ensued relative to public acknowledgment of staff and others.

**V. ADJOURNMENT**

Prior to adjourning, Mr. Green extended condolences to the following staff members who have recently lost family members:

- Annette Libby, mother of Karen Phillips, Kitchen Manager at Winter Hill Community Innovation School.
- Diane Hesketh, sister of Linda Murree-Walsh, teacher at Winter Hill Community Innovation School.

The following family members of staff passed away during the summer months.

- Harold Gill, father of Patricia Gill, Somerville High School teacher.
- Mary Mullaney, mother of Maureen Foley, Account Clerk in the Special Education Evaluation Center.
- Robert "Bob" Waters, husband of Helen Waters, Principal Clerk in the Special Education Evaluation Center.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:33 p.m. via voice vote.

**RELATED DOCUMENTS:**

1. Agenda
2. School Committee minutes of August 28, 2017
3. Four (4) Out of State or Overnight Field Trip requests
4. Four (4) donation acceptances
5. A communication from the City Clerk's office re: School Committee salary increases
6. A Resolution to Affirm Somerville Public Schools Support for DACA Students
7. One (1) letter of condolence
8. Seven (7) thank you letters for donations