



# Somerville Public Schools

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Somerville's Winter Hill Community Innovation School Awarded Boston Foundation 'Pozen Prize for Innovative Schools' *Winter Hill first public school district Innovation school to receive this award*

Somerville, MA – In a ceremony held in its downtown Boston office last night, The Boston Foundation announced the Winter Hill Community Innovation School as the winner of the **2017 Pozen Prize for Innovative Schools**. Established in 2013 by Boston Foundation donors Robert and Elizabeth Pozen, the Pozen Prize recognizes and awards schools for innovative practices that lead to academic excellence and a quality learning environment for all students. The Winter Hill Community Innovation School is the first district Innovation School to receive this distinction and the \$75,000 award. The Pozen Prize expanded its scope this year to include innovative district schools.

“At the Winter Hill, we believe that every student is uniquely positioned to succeed if given the right guidance and the necessary resources. Our status as an Innovation School, and the increased autonomy that comes with that, has allowed us to introduce new educational and support practices that afford all of our students equitable opportunities for success,” stated Winter Hill Principal, Chad Mazza. “Everyone in the Winter Hill community – from students and parents to teachers and the community at large – are truly invested in our Wildcats’ education and thrilled to be recognized with this year’s Pozen Prize.”

“The Winter Hill has worked hard to create a learning environment that not only supports every student and engages them in their own learning, but one that also fosters an expectation that every person plays an important role in creating a positive learning environment,” added Superintendent of Schools, Mary Skipper. “We are very proud of the work happening every day in our schools, and of the ownership and leadership that teachers and students take in their school communities. We are also incredibly grateful to the Boston Foundation and to Mr. and Mrs. Pozen for their vision and their commitment to outstanding educational practices.”

“The Winter Hill Community Innovation School has been a true lab for innovation for Somerville and has spearheaded numerous new practices that now benefit not just students at the school but all students across the city,” said Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone. “We could not be more proud that the Boston Foundation chose to honor our school and students with this year’s Pozen Prize.”

Since its designation as an Innovation School in 2012-2013, the Winter Hill has leveraged the autonomies Innovation status affords to develop a curricular program designed to challenge and support every student regardless of where they might be in their academic development, and to develop a school culture that promotes collaborative and innovative thinking and practices. In 2014, the school advanced to Level 2 status on the state’s 5-level accountability rating and has remained a Level 2 school since. Winter Hill serves a diverse population of students that includes more than 60% of whom list a first language other than English, and ELL and Special Education student populations of nearly 30% each.

Winter Hill notes five ‘key drivers’ in laying the foundation for an innovative, child-centered, engaging learning environment. Those key drivers are:

- **Focus on inclusion**, which extends beyond the typical walls of blended classrooms and into the realms of professional development, goal-setting, leadership development, and school culture;



- **A decision-making model that engages all members of its community** including active involvement by students in shaping the culture and academic program at their school;
- **A consistent focus on student outcomes** using data to jointly assess and reinforce students' roles as leaders in their educational journeys;
- **Social-emotional health as a critical piece of a students' successful academic journey**, including the adoption of Responsive Classroom to support the development of a positive school climate and promote a common language school-wide, as well as specialized therapeutic programs and rich out-of-school-time programming; and
- **Family engagement**, working in partnership with the Winter Hill PTA to provide families support and consistent opportunities to engage in their child's learning.

Through a teacher-led systemic process, the Winter Hill has continued to cultivate practices that will allow students to thrive as active participants in their learning.

"I am excited for the staff and students of the Winter Hill Community Innovation School," commented Jackie Lawrence, President of the Somerville Teachers' Association. "This project was truly a bottom up approach to designing an Innovation School. It valued the voices of educators who work with students each and every day, and I believe the model reflects their care and concern for their students. I am pleased that the exceptional work of these educators was recognized by the Boston Foundation and The Pozen family."

School Committee Chair, Laura Pitone, added the following: "It is so exciting that the Winter Hill Community School is being recognized as an innovation school, and a double honor as it is the first in-district innovation school to receive this award from the Boston Foundation. Throughout the innovation design and implementation it was clear that Winter Hill had a strong and connected community dedicated to meeting the needs of their diverse student population, especially in their efforts to support the connection between social and emotional learning and academic success. Our students are the real winners, benefiting from the creativity and flexibility a thoughtfully designed innovation school can afford a district."

The Winter Hill was one of five schools in the Greater Boston area invited to apply for the 2017 award, along with the Paul Revere Innovation School in Revere, the Carlton Elementary School in Salem, and the Eliot K-8 Innovation School and Gardner Pilot Academy in Boston. All five schools had either innovation or pilot status. Selection criteria for the five candidates included a consistently high or much-improved performance in ELA and Math on the PARCC or MCAS over the last three years for all students as well as for high-needs populations, student enrollment rates in high-needs groups that resembled enrollment rates of the district, and lower out-of-school suspension rates. As part of the initial application process, schools were asked to provide information about their instructional program design, goals, and best practices. A selection panel of civic and community leaders reviewed the five applications and narrowed the field to two finalists, each of whom hosted a visit from members of the Pozen Prize Selection Committee as part of the final competitive process.