

Somerville Parents ResiStat Meeting January 5th, 2008, Capuano Early Education Center

Joseph A. Curtatone, Mayor of Somerville
Paul Bockelman, Chair of School Committee & Member, Ward 6
M. Teresa Cardoso, School Committee Member, Ward 2
Adam Sweeting, School Committee Member, Ward 3
Anthony Pierantozzi, Superintendent, Somerville Public Schools
Anthony Holloway, Somerville Chief of Police
Gretchen Kinder, Coordinator of R&D, Public Information and Grants, SPS.
Stephanie Hirsch, SomerStat Director
Ethan Field, ResiStat Analyst
Simone Braga, Marjorie Alexandre, Herenia Hernandez, Parent Liaisons,
SPS Parent Information Center.

In these notes:

- 1) **Notes from the conversation with Mayor Curtatone and Superintendent Pierantozzi**
 - 2) **Summary of notes from the writing activity**
 - 3) **Next Steps for School Staff, City Staff, and Parents**
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Notes from the Conversation with Mayor Curtatone and Superintendent Pierantozzi:

Topics Presented by City Staff:

- Gretchen Kinder is forming an ad hoc Marketing Team for the Schools.
- Our "21st Century Schools" grant for the Healey and Winter Hill Schools are being continued.
- The SomerStat Office is exploring the idea of "Cohort Tracking", a longitudinal study which would involve tracking children born in one calendar year (or school year) and staying in contact with their families as they age and go through the schools.
- One of the goals of the City is to create a consolidated calendar of programming, including family-related programming.
- Chief Holloway explained how the shift to focus on Community Policing will allow for resident input by permitting officers to get to know specific neighborhoods better.
- Superintendent Pierantozzi mentioned that college recruiters value high-achievers from urban schools. The Somerville Public School System offers a blend of vocational, technical and academic education that's not available in other districts.

Resident Comments:

- **Web Sites:** Both parents and City officials recognized the need to improve the information available on both the City and Schools web sites and the ease of finding information.
- **Parents and School Buildings:** Some parents expressed a desire to have more opportunities to go into the physical schools, so that their contacts with teachers, other parents, and the school community are not limited to dropping children off.
- **Somerville as a Place to Raise Children:** A resident observed there are often more learning advantages to growing up in Somerville and attending Somerville Public Schools than you might see in an MCAS report or a listing of programs. A parent said that because

of her child's experience in Unidos, "My can now speak in Spanish and negotiates the bakeries on East Broadway with ease." One parent said he couldn't live in Arlington or Natick – he likes the urban feel of Somerville.

- **East Somerville Community School:** One parent said it would be helpful to get updates on the ESCS rebuilding, even if it's just to say, "We don't know yet, we're working on it." A parent noted the ESCS fire is an opportunity to harness community support for schools in general.
 - **Displays at Schools:** A parent suggested that the City have display cases in front of each school in which student work and art gets displayed.
 - **Describing the SPS:** A parent said he would like to hear how Somerville stands relative to other districts, including what are our unique strengths and challenges.
 - **Reviewing other Districts' Practices:** A parent suggested that the City or SPS review how other districts communicate with parents. This could be part of the marketing committee's work.
 - **Reaching Average Students:** A parent noted that there is some idea of the High School being strong for high achievers and vocational students, but that there is less known about the value for the average student. One person said that this impression especially holds for people who attended SPS themselves, and that this is an important group to reach.
 - **Outreach to Immigrant Communities:** Parents noted that interpreters were present, but the flyer and presentation had not been translated. SomerStat staff said we are still learning the best ways to reach out to communities whose first language is not English. We hope to encourage bilingual residents to act as ambassadors to their respective communities.
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Summary of Comments from the Writing Activity:

What do you want to know?

... about support & programs for infants & toddlers?

- When are storytimes, playgroups, music groups, new moms groups, and what ages are they for?
- What childcare (centers & homecare) options are available?
- Is there any online/website where all of the info can be housed? A link off the Somerville website?

Additional Comment/Requests. At least one parent requested/said that we:

- Need more opportunities for physical activity during the winter months, especially on weekends. Example: More convenient open skate hours at Conway during the week for 3-4 year-olds and for older kids on half-day Wednesdays.
- Need to expand affordable recreational activities for young children.
- Address children born after August 31st being older in their cohort and having to wait to start Pre-K and K programs.
- Expand childcare options to be accessible to families with two working parents.

...about entering the school system and K-8 schooling & recreation?

- When do I need to start thinking about preschool or Kindergarten? What are the options and trade-offs of each? When do I need to sign up / get on waiting lists?
- How easy is it to transfer schools/programs if for some reason the school that your child is in doesn't work for your child? How about between grades?

- What rights do I have as a parent to help make changes in school/classrooms and gain access to schools?
- What is the overall and specific performance of the Somerville School system? (report card)
- What is the improvement plan and how do we perform given this plan?
- How can I participate/contribute?

Additional Comment/Requests. At least one parent requested/said that we:

- Expand the Recreation Department to include much more and a wider variety of recreation programs for young children (pre-school etc.) and school-aged children.
- Make school more welcoming to parents:
 - Share curriculum goals and instructional methods with parents
 - Allow better parents access to buildings
 - Better utilize volunteer work from parents (like Cambridge Volunteer Program)
- Need support groups for immigrants

...about educational support and recreation for adults?

- Where do I find information about:
 - ESOL classes (English for Speakers of Other Languages)
 - Intergenerational activities
 - Information about job and job training, computer training
 - Low housing and affordable housing info
 - Adult Educational opportunities in general

Additional Comment/Requests. At least one parent requested/said that:

- Kennedy pool is a great resource made available to the community, but hours are limited. We should not rent pool to teams during lap swim times. Sign-up times for swim lessons are *always* Monday at 3PM, which is difficult for working parents to make. Can we have online and/or mail-in registration for swimming?
- We need a common public building with space for classes, community meetings, etc.

Where do you go for information about...?

...programs & resources for infants & toddlers?

...entering the school system and K-8 schooling & recreation?

...educational support and recreation for adults?

(answers to all three were very similar)

- Somerville-Moms Yahoo Group (x4) and other email lists
- Other parents in parks and playgrounds (x3)
- Somerville Family Network (playgroups) (x2) and Parent Information Center
- Neighbors/coworkers with older children
- Recreation Dept.
- Private daycare centers, Jewish Family and Children's Services' New Moms group
- StellaBella Toys (Porter & Inman), Porter Square Books, Coffee shops
- Somerville Public Schools, but not the web site.
- Libraries
- School Committee members
- Google / Internet Search

- Newspapers, though not much is there.

Additional Comment/Requests. At least one parent requested/said:

- They would like more info in newspapers
 - They would like to see public bulletin boards
 - School website: Hard to find staff members' email addresses. Choice and Unidos programs should be listed separately, so people who don't know they exist can find them.
 - Not enough parks info on City web site (and should include DCR parks)
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Next Steps for Somerville Schools:

- Look up comparative school performance data for Somerville children vs. children in other urban schools.
- Hold "Open House" meetings at schools where parents can tour the school their child attends.
- Continue to send information about how and where to register for schools to newspapers.
- Explore distributing school information in places mentioned above by parents.
- Consolidate information about adult educational opportunities and publicize.
- Explore the possibility of online registration for Kennedy School pool classes.

Next Steps for City Staff:

- City is currently pricing display cases for schools which will have info posted.
- City is looking into implementing community bulletin boards which will be placed in many City parks.
- The SomerStat Office is exploring the idea of "Cohort Tracking", a longitudinal study which would involve tracking children born in one calendar year (or school year) and staying in contact with their families as they age and go through the schools.
- City is creating a consolidated online/email calendar for all City events and programs, which residents would be able to filter by their own areas of interest.
- Continue to expand indoor recreational activities for winter months.
- Translate Recreation & Youth program brochures into other languages.
- Explore the possibility of engaging with SCALE English language learners so they can be ambassadors between the City and their communities.
- Look up comparative data on Somerville children vs. children in other urban areas.
- Explore distributing City and parent information in places mentioned by parents.

Next Steps for Residents & Parents:

- Use email lists to share information about story-times, play groups, etc.
- Participate in School Improvement Plan meetings.
- Find school registration information through the Parents' Information Center.