



Towards an Opportunity Agenda in Somerville, MA: Expanded Learning Through Collective Action

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Towards an Opportunity Agenda in Somerville, MA:
Expanded Learning Through Collective Action

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)
Capstone

Submitted by

Jeffrey J. Curley

To the Harvard Graduate School of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education Leadership.

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Dedication

For the talented and effervescent students who rode the *El Sistema* afterschool shuttle,
you always brought me joy and restored my energy.

Profound Thanks

To my capstone chair, academic adviser, and mentor Professor Paul Reville, who has patiently encouraged me to embrace leadership, value different perspectives, and always remember that “all means all”;

to my residency supervisor Mary Skipper, who has become a friend and mentor this year, and who has shown me what it means to lead with boundless energy, personal generosity, and a focus on students;

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Ronen, Ruth Santos, Skye Stewart, and Karen Woods, who welcomed and taught me so much this year;

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Abstract

It is increasingly clear that schools alone cannot address all of the factors needed to close the opportunity gap between low-income and underprivileged students and their middle-class and more affluent peers. For one thing, the school day and school year are simply too short to adequately address the factors at play. Moreover, student needs are multifaceted, and a multidisciplinary approach is required to adequately meet them. Thus cross-sectional collaboration is needed, particularly in addressing how learning can be extended beyond the school day and school year, and into the early childhood years.

This capstone details my efforts to bring a collective impact approach to out of school time (OST) programming in Somerville, Massachusetts, where I spent a year working for the superintendent of schools and in conjunction with a variety of school, city, and civic leaders toward a shared goal of expanding access to and advancing equity through extended learning that meets the needs of all students and families.¹

I argue that Somerville is the right place at the right time for this type of effort due to its progressive and diverse citizenry, innovative and committed leadership, and broad base of political will for expanding out of school time due to the affordability crisis being experienced across economic strata in the city. Through a new Community Cabinet of local leaders, a taskforce to organize providers and connect them to government officials, a new education foundation to support the efforts financially, and a community visioning process to co-commission and co-design long-term goals, I created

¹ This paper uses the language of out of school time (OST) programming and afterschool and summer programming interchangeably.

opportunities for collective ideation, planning, and implementation. The results included an increase in quality afterschool programming for low-income and marginalized students. They also revealed systemic challenges, however, including entrenched inequities, cultural disconnects, and competing priorities. The work is now at an important crossroads, and political will and courage is necessary to deepen reforms and to cultivate meaningful leadership among diverse community stakeholders.

Done well, this effort has the potential to extend the ideals of inclusive, participatory democracy at the municipal level. I argue that this promising model shows the power that collective impact can have when it is intentionally purposed toward a project for which no one institution or group can initiate, implement, or sustain the work that is necessary for success.

Introduction

My partner Abby and I decided to raise our family in Somerville because we love the city's quiriness, accessibility, and vibrancy. What Somerville may lack in open space, it more than makes up for in interesting, informed, diverse, and engaged residents. Somerville Public Schools (SPS) Superintendent Mary Skipper has the dedication and drive to serve the children of these residents, and I determined to dedicate my residency year to a project that would make her job easier—and the city my family loves better. I also hoped that my residency year would be a chance to experiment with and actualize my passion for civic engagement that had felt somewhat abstract in my previous work with the nonprofit iCivics.

Somerville has many of the conditions that authentic engagement and civic change require. It has stable, popular, and innovative leaders in Superintendent Skipper and eight-term Mayor Joe Curtatone. It has a diverse and progressive citizenry who seem eager to express themselves and engage with city leadership. Yet Somerville is also grappling with affordability pressures, shifting demographics, and federal threats, particularly to our immigrant populations. As I started residency, it seemed to me that opportunities to promote educational equity and excellence were shifting in the United States: downward from national, and even state, governments towards cities and metropolitan areas. This is a trend that urban scholars Bruce Katz and Jeremy Nowak have termed “the new localism” (2017). Reform efforts have moved away from singular entities and towards networks of public, private, and civic actors. With all of these

considerations in my mind, I was excited to accept a residency working for SPS and Superintendent Skipper.

Bold and collaborative approaches to problem solving have defined Somerville's recent civic history and made it a dynamic city model. Even before the term was coined, Somerville was an early pioneer in the "collective impact" model for governance and civic engagement (Kania & Kramer, 2011). When city leadership embarked on its journey to develop a 20-year comprehensive plan for 2010-2030, SomerVision, they did so through a collective vision of making Somerville into an "exceptional place to live, work, play and raise a family." A wide range of 60 community stakeholders led an inclusive process that yielded collective ownership of a comprehensive and forward-looking plan (City of Somerville, 2017). SomerVision now serves as a transparent and accessible guide for growth and development in the city, providing a framework for deliberation about future neighborhood and capital planning. As the community debates issues like a new transfer fee to fund affordable housing or downzoning² residential neighborhoods to improve parking access, the SomerVision plan has served as a critical mediating document.

In 2016, Harvard selected Somerville and five other cities across the United States as the first cohort to participate in its *By All Means* initiative. Each *By All Means* city has created a Community Cabinet—a cross-sector team including the mayor, the school

² Downzoning limits the permitted density of housing and development. In 2018, a new city zoning proposal proposed a hard limit of two units max for districts zoned "neighborhood residential." A single-family home could be converted to two-family via special permit, but a new three-family could not be built anywhere in a neighborhood district.

superintendent, the health department director, and community and civic leaders—focused on creating integrated systems of opportunity and support from early childhood through higher education. These cities are laboratories for the development of advanced, integrated systems that seek to make it possible for all students to succeed (Education Redesign Lab, 2017).

Somerville’s approach to education was a good fit for *By All Means*, because the SPS School Committee has set as a goal “developing the whole child—the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical potential of all students” (SPS School Committee, 2017). The district has an explicit commitment to providing all SPS students with the skills, opportunities, and resources to nurture innovative ideas, find strength in diversity, inspire lifelong learning, and encourage civic engagement. Since her selection as superintendent in December 2014, Mary Skipper has significantly invested in social-emotional learning resources, wraparound health supports, and personalized learning pathways in keeping with this commitment to whole child development.

By good fortune, as I was exploring the possibility of a residency working for Mary Skipper, Somerville’s *By All Means* consultant stepped down to run for Alderman-At-Large. In January 2017, Superintendent Skipper, with the support of Mayor Curtatone, invited me to take over that role and help facilitate the Somerville Cabinet’s efforts. This role allowed me to meet many of the leaders I would work closely with throughout my residency. It also allowed me to help shape Somerville’s *By All Means* effort.

The focus of this work was informed by the acute pressure of rising cost of living across the city. While the city’s tax base is rising, many families are being priced out of

the city. Housing costs have far outpaced modest increases in household income (Sweet, 2015). Since 2000, single-family home sales in Somerville have increased in price by 112%.

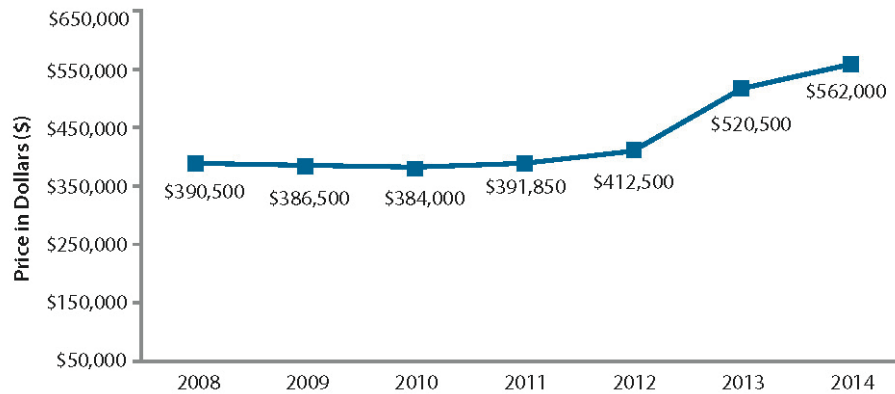


Figure 1. Trend in Somerville Median Single-Family Home Selling Price (2008-2014). Reprinted from *The Wellbeing of Somerville Report* (p. 20), 2017, Somerville, MA: Cambridge Health Alliance. Copyright 2017 by the Cambridge Health Alliance. Reprinted with permission.

The rental market is no less challenging: the average market rent for a two-bedroom Somerville apartment, now more than \$2,500, requires a household income of around \$90,000 to keep housing expenses within recommended total income range (Cambridge Health Alliance, 2017). At the same time, for well over a decade, Somerville household sizes have shrunk. This trend has led to fewer households with minor children and a growing cohort of adults aged 25-34, while families such as ours move further from the city center by the time children are school-age. Whether this trajectory will continue is uncertain, but of critical consequence to the city.

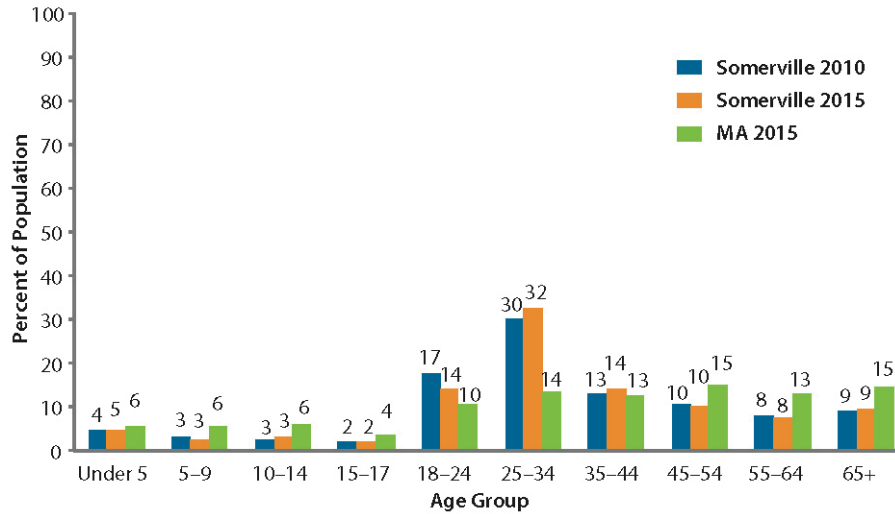


Figure 2. Somerville Population by Age Group (2010 and 2015). Reprinted from The Wellbeing of Somerville Report (p. 15), 2017, Somerville, MA: Cambridge Health Alliance. Copyright 2017 by the Cambridge Health Alliance. Reprinted with permission.

In an effort to make it possible and appealing for more Somerville residents in our largest age cohort (25-34) to stay and raise families when they reach their late 30s and 40s, we began to focus the *By All Means* work around developing a comprehensive plan for access to high-quality preschool, expanded out of school time, and universal kindergarten readiness that supports the intellectual and social-emotional growth of all children. Given the strong and broad political impetus for increasing OST options for all families, there was also an opportunity to make equity a central focus of this work. Poor children are most adversely affected when OST options are not available, and well-designed OST programs can have a considerable impact on the opportunity gap (Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007).

The school district, the early childhood team, and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have since been working collaboratively towards a strategic continuum of services to strengthen early childhood and OST options for more

Somerville children. The cabinet has established key process indicators, participation metrics, and ultimate student outcomes to measure the success of this collective work. A graphic of Somerville key cabinet stakeholders and partners can be found in Appendix A.

Residency and Strategic Project Framing

I began my residency in summer 2017 under the mentorship and direct supervision of Superintendent Skipper at a critical moment. Whether Somerville can remain attractive and affordable for family-rearing age households in the city will have a massive impact on the community's future. And our commitment to equity is being tested as wealthier families move in among more economically disadvantaged populations. My strategic work focused on developing and implementing a strategy for expanded access to out of school time learning that would provide a rich learning experience for pre-K to Grade 8 students, decrease opportunity gaps between rich and poor students, and ease financial pressures on working families that would otherwise have to pay for preschool, after-school, and summertime care for their children.

Superintendent Skipper invited me to join as a full member of her weekly district cabinet, facilitate some School Committee meetings, and correspond with key constituents and policy makers. We met formally for an hour each Friday and kept in frequent touch by email and text message. Superintendent Skipper gave me full access to view her work calendar and encouraged me to join any and all meetings of interest. This provided an extensive understanding of her leadership style and priorities for Somerville Public Schools. The access also provided a helpful vantage point to see the crosscutting

political and economic pressures with which urban superintendents and city officials grapple.

Under Superintendent Skipper's guidance, I sought to create opportunities for co-construction of equity-minded systems for early childhood and out of school time. I increasingly focused on building institutional and public support and pathways to sustainability for expanding OST options to meet the needs of parents and students across the city and ultimately weaken the tie between socio-economic status and life outcomes.

Through the Community Cabinet, I worked closely with city officials, including the mayor and director of Somerville HHS, School Committee members, and other business and civic leaders to build support for a more robust, inclusive, and intentional mixed-delivery model to provide access to afterschool and summer learning as well as early childhood education for every family in Somerville. I also convened and supported the existing youth-serving organizations in Somerville, co-leading the effort to organize an Out of School Time Taskforce with more than 30 agencies and practitioners across Somerville. I also helped to launch Somerville's first education foundation, as a potential sustaining mechanism, with a handful of other Somerville residents. Finally, I embarked on a public community visioning project, to try to build long-term community leadership for a collaborative and systemic approach to educating and nurturing Somerville's youngest residents.

Chapter I. Review of Knowledge for Action

This Review of Knowledge for Action aims to understand the why and how of Somerville’s Community Cabinet and its role in building an opportunity agenda through a mixed-delivery approach to expanded out of school time options. Expanded OST learning is critically important to closing opportunity gaps for disadvantaged students and making Somerville affordable for all families. Service integration—across city, school, and community groups—will lead to better educational opportunity and a strengthened community for residents (Rebell & Wolff, 2008). Launching, implementing, and sustaining this vision is possible if Somerville embraces and supports a collective impact model that prioritizes cross-agency collaboration, civic agency, and broad community participation. The success of this effort depends on a collective and inclusive effort with equity at the center of its design.

Opportunity Gaps and Economic Inequities

We are living through one of the most inequitable periods in our nation’s history. Over the course of my lifetime, the richest 1% of Americans have seen their share of the nation’s income roughly double—from 11% in 1980 to 21% today (Rothwell, 2017). This trend towards stratification has resulted in stagnant living standards for many Americans. During this same period, the black–white wealth gap has tripled (Shapiro, 2017). Somerville reflects this unequal distribution of wealth, with new million-dollar condominiums alongside deteriorating 1940s era public housing. While wealthy parents campaign to ban pre-dressing of salads in school cafeterias, organizations like the Somerville Backpack Program deliver weekend groceries to a growing population of

food-insecure school children. Roughly 15% of Somerville residents live in poverty, including nearly 23% of children under the age of 18 (Cambridge Health Alliance, 2017).

The prospects for Somerville's most vulnerable students are dim in the absence of better support. Children born to less-advantaged households and communities in the United States typically experience lower levels of educational attainment, employment, earnings, health, and well-being as adults than children born to more advantaged ones (Chetty, Hendren, & Katz, 2016). Differences between individuals from more- and less-advantaged backgrounds manifest early in childhood and tend to grow as children age (Fryer & Levitt, 2006; Heckman & Mosso, 2014; McLeod & Kaiser, 2004). Most low-income children experience this cycle of poverty; nearly two out of three children born into the bottom fifth of the income distribution remain in the bottom two-fifths of the income distribution as adults (Isaacs, Sawhill, & Haskins, 2008).

America's belief in socio-economic mobility has been a founding principle that binds our diverse, pluralistic democracy. Yet if communities such as Somerville are to live up to this American dream they will require increased early investments in the skills of disadvantaged children and sustained investments over time. Inequities in access to learning opportunities are fundamental to disparities in child achievement and well-being. By age 3, children in low-income families have heard 30 million fewer words than children in higher income families (Hart & Risely, 2003). In families below the federal poverty line, only 46% of children aged 3 through 6 are enrolled in center-based early childhood care; this figure jumps to 72% of children in families above the poverty line (Potok, 2017). According to Expanded Schools, by sixth grade, middle class kids have

likely spent 6,000 more hours learning than kids that are born into poverty (ExpandedED Schools, 2017).

Moreover, if affluent families continue to move to more expensive areas, following national trends in terms of rising residential segregation by income (Reardon & Bischoff, 2011), Somerville's poorer children will continue to attend under-resourced schools with limited afterschool options. All of these issues compound to limit opportunity: children born into poverty are more likely to attend income-segregated and financially-strapped schools, are less likely to achieve high educational outcomes, and are therefore more likely to experience unemployment and civic disconnection.

Widely accessible out of school learning offers a two-pronged approach to addressing the widening opportunity gap. First, it provides critically needed expanded learning for disadvantaged children. Second, it decreases the chances that more advantaged families will leave the city and take their tax dollars and education-focused political capital with them.

Political and Policy Choices

The challenges Somerville's poorest face are not just economic, but fundamentally structural and political. Economic research indicates that particular policy choices, rather than fatalistic forces such as accelerating globalization or the forward march of technology, have produced the United States' gross economic inequalities (Alesina & Rodrik, 1994; Piketty, 2015). However disheartening the news is that children suffer because powerful adults made policy choices to protect their own power, this also suggests that progressive communities like Somerville can take deliberate and collective

action to reverse these wrongs. Our policy choices are themselves the outcomes of politics, and political change demands an active and informed citizenry. Through a combination of deliberation, broad-based collaboration, and civic action, we can overcome institutions and ideologies that have marginalized the voice and agency of some citizens (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Levine, 2013).

The common root causes of U.S. education challenges—pedagogical, organizational, social, cultural—are political as well (Labaree, 1997). The education reform debates of the last several decades have reflected a narrow emphasis on academic achievement and vocational attainment within the school day, with many policy makers assuming more rigorous academics in schools, along with a wider distribution of skills, will naturally reduce income inequality. After decades of education reform fought on these grounds, the United States has made some progress toward closing racial, ethnic, and economic gaps in educational outcomes. Over a 25-year period, the achievement gaps in math and reading on National Assessment of Educational Progress standardized tests have narrowed modestly, depending on grade and subject (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). However, continued large disparities in academic achievement provide clear evidence that Black, Hispanic, and poor children grow up with more limited educational opportunities than White and wealthy children. Moreover, achievement gaps do not close as children get older. In fact, they are roughly the same size for children in fourth and eighth grades. This suggests that the narrowing of achievement gaps in recent years is likely the result of equalizing educational opportunity during early childhood or early

elementary years rather than comprehensive reform that might further narrow the gap after the fourth grade (Ladd & Goertz, 2015; Magnuson & Greg, 2016).

When narrowly conceived and in silos, K–12 education reform alone cannot actually address such significant disparities. The traditional school day and year simply do not contain enough hours to enable all students to learn the skills necessary to lead successful lives in the 21st century. During their K–12 years, U.S. students spend barely 20% of their waking hours in school; 80% of potential learning time occurs outside of school (Wherry, 2004). It is increasingly clear that schools alone cannot address all of the factors that affect children’s learning and that it will take a more collective effort to develop a coordinated, system-wide approach to supporting all kids. This is especially true as growing economic inequities are leading to mounting disparities in child enrichment spending.

More advantaged parents have long understood the benefits of out of school learning and have invested in such opportunities for their children. Over the last 40 years, parents with more education and income have provided a mounting supply of enrichment opportunities through tutors, summer camps, and extracurricular activities. Lower income parents simply have not had the resources to keep up with this trend. Thus, in the early 1970s, high-income families spent just under \$3,000 more per year (in present dollar value) on child enrichment than low-income families (Duncan & Murnane, 2011). By 2006, this gap had more than tripled, to over \$9,000 (see Appendix B). Spending differences are largest for enrichment activities such as music lessons, travel, and summer camps (Kaushal, Magnuson, & Waldfogel, 2011). Differential access to such activities

may explain the gaps in background knowledge between children from high-income families and those from low-income families that are so predictive of reading skills in the middle and high school years (Snow, 2002).

For less advantaged students, scant government resources have historically been dedicated to out of school time to make up for this gap. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) began to change this, including modest steps to focus new attention on children's OST activities and their outcomes. Children in schools that fail to help all students reach proficiency are eligible to receive supplemental, OST educational services. Researchers of the resulting afterschool programs have indicated that, in comparison with middle-income children, low-income children are more in need of afterschool opportunities and more likely to benefit from them (Cosden, Morrison, Albanese, & Macias, 2001; Miller, 2003).

The OST opportunities available under NCLB are far from enough, however, to make up for the persistent and growing afterschool and summer learning gap. The Somerville Community Cabinet has recognized that the city can and must alleviate enrichment disparities by reforming and investing in our OST system. The city and school district are committed to creating an integrated system of opportunity and support from early childhood through graduation that is accessible to all of Somerville's children.

Case for High-Quality OST

Due to a number of factors, coordinated city systems to deliver quality OST programs have been on the rise across the United States. These programs typically engage youth in different ways from schools, homes, independent, or even peer group

experiences. For example, OST programs provide a structured, safe, and engaging learning context, but youth often make independent choices about how and with whom to spend their time. High-quality OST programs also offer young people the opportunity to forge positive relationships with adults and peers, and build social, cognitive, and practical skills. Research has shown that healthy relationships form the foundation of social-emotional skills and the ability to function successfully throughout life—at home, in school, with family and friends, and as members of civic communities (Crowley, Greenberg, & Jones, 2015).

More than a decade of research shows that afterschool and summer programs across the country are an integral support for children, families, and communities. Young people can benefit academically, socially, and emotionally from high-quality afterschool programs (Kidron & Lindsay, 2014; Lauer et al., 2006; Roth, Malone, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010;). Historically, however, as is the case in Somerville, afterschool and summer systems within a particular city have been decentralized and disorganized, with different programs and funding entities operating in isolation from one another (Halpern, 2006). The result is a lack of access to high-quality programs, particularly for those young people most in need (After School Alliance, 2014). Civic leaders in many cities have come to understand that they cannot solve the problem simply by paying for more programs ad hoc, and instead must curate a systems-level approach. In Somerville, the challenge among elementary afterschool and summer providers is largely one of coordination and communication, but as children age, limited resources are belied by a

lack of available options. Among Somerville middle-grade students, fewer than one in 10 are in a known afterschool program.

Ideally, extended-day and extended-year programs are well-integrated parts of a coherent strategy to build children’s skills and self-efficacy. In many cases, the school becomes the center of children’s daily experiences and is the logical place for OST programs, which increases integration with the school day and reduces exposure to potential challenges and trauma in the broader community. Yet this approach has real limitations if not done in close coordination with local communities: it can be perceived as ignoring or, worse yet, stigmatizing what should be community strengths. The key to developing a successful OST system is to strike the right balance between seamlessly complementing in-school hours while also being well-integrated into the community. Thus the precise location and delivery method should fit local context.³ Because of Somerville’s density and space constraints, the infrastructure of its 11 schools are ideal sites for afterschool and summer programs. Whether the school district, a specific city agency, or a nonprofit intermediary should lead Somerville’s integrated OST system is an open and important political question to the effectiveness and sustainability of this work.

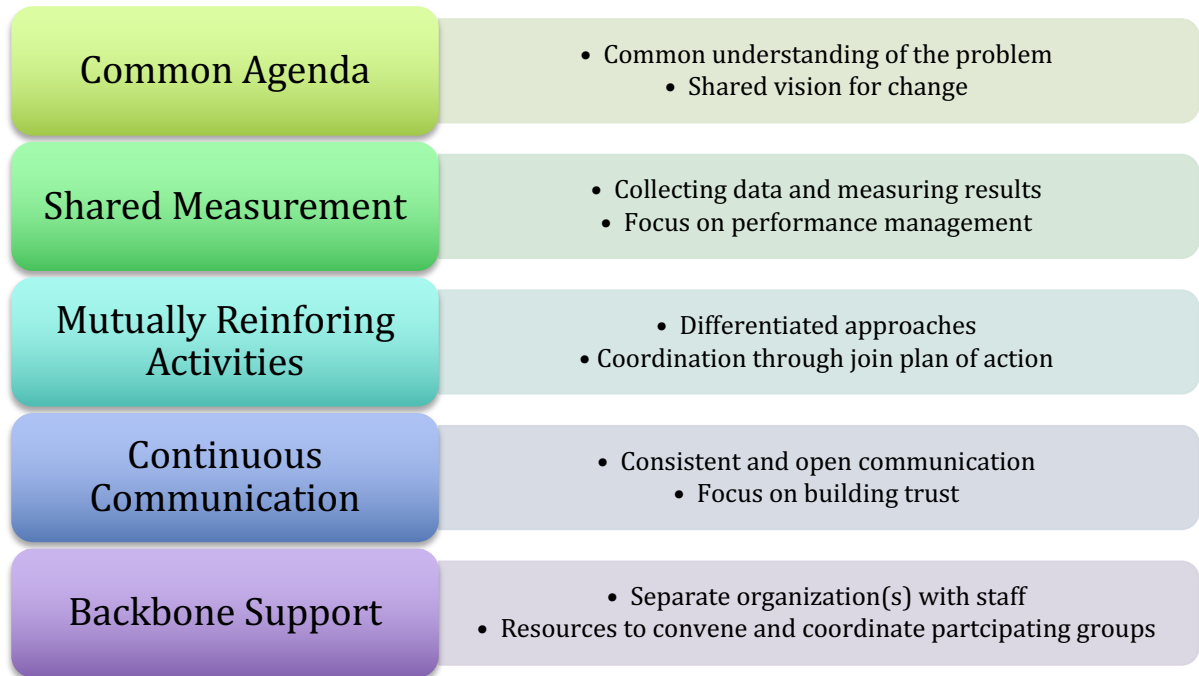
Case for Collective Impact

While not new, collaborative efforts increasingly seem necessary to meet the complex challenges facing students, schools, and communities today. Many types of

³ In a 2015 Wallace Foundation survey, among 212 OST intermediaries surveyed 56 were local nonprofits; 37 were multi-service nonprofits, including historic social service agencies like the YMCA; 25 were state networks; and 16 were local foundations. The survey classified 50 as “other,” suggesting even greater variation.

student needs and root causes are multifaceted, and single-source solutions are too weak to address them. This is certainly the case in Somerville, where housing affordability, food security, and health care access all directly affect student learning. Meeting these challenges requires flexible innovation and community action. Communication and resource streams must be cultivated, coupled with real conversations around equity and effectiveness between many different stakeholders. Collaborations that foster formal and informal working relationships across areas of government and community groups generate better outcomes and reduce duplication and waste (Rebell, 2012).

Collective impact is a theory of change that may help guide some of the collaboration that is needed. Attention to this theory has surged in recent years, following John Kania and Mark Kramer's "Collective Impact" article in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. The researchers noted that successful examples of collective impact were rare, evidence of effectiveness was limited, and that collective impact programs are not necessarily appropriate for all types of social problems. Nonetheless, they advanced five key conditions that they believe can result in effective collective impact projects.



*Figure 3. Five Conditions of Collective Impact. Reprinted from “Collective Impact,” by J. Kania & M. Kramer, 2011, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 9, pp. 36-41. Copyright 2011 by the J. Kania & M. Kramer.*

Since the coining of the term *collective impact*, academics and researchers have attempted to clearly define the concept and to situate it in the educational context.

Columbia Teachers College Professor Jeffrey Henig has advocated for collaborations that are “locally organized, large scale, cross-sector (involving at least two sectors of the government plus the civic sector), inclusive of the school district, focused on educational outcomes, and formal” (Henig Riehl, Rebell, & Wolff, 2015). Others have focused on operational coordination, data-driven action, and common indicators (Cohen & Price, 2015). Most literature on collective impact, both broadly and in education particularly, points to the use of data and outcome measures as essential to the process (Grossman, Lombard, & Fisher, 2014).

Regardless of precise “fit” with the collective impact model,⁴ a growing number of local cross-sector education collaborations are aligning resources to ensure that more children have what they need to succeed in school. This approach lifts up community assets and rejects the artificial divides between school and out of school time, between city and school services, and between government and private sector work. It also holds the possibility for creating a “new engine” in education that can meet the needs of a growing student population across the United States (Reville, 2014). Policy makers have long debated whether schools or social factors are the most critical variable in students’ academic success (Gamoran & Long, 2006). The cross-sector approach aims to address both variables to help all students succeed.

The collective impact model places strong emphasis on the importance of building consensus around shared data (Grossman, Lombard, & Fisher, 2014; Maeroff, 2014). Somerville has this capacity thanks in part to its innovative SomerStat platform, which uses evidence-based insights to understand important community issues and improve delivery of city and school services. During its 12 years in operation, SomerStat has evolved and grown more sophisticated each year. People in the city’s 16 departments attend bi-weekly or monthly meetings with key city decision makers to track progress on

⁴ Despite the fact that *collective impact* may have a flexible meaning and provide an umbrella for a wide range of specific activities, it neither applies nor appeals to all current cross-sector collaborations for education. Many collaborative efforts have their own histories and ways of working. Some nonprofit entities have declined to use the term and others have critiqued the collective impact model as inadequate to effective social change (Carson, 2012). Researchers have made little effort to examine the historical tradition of collaborative efforts such as Communities in Schools, Promise Neighborhoods, and Say Yes to Education to address urban problems that pre-date the theorization of collective impact.

performance. This infrastructure forms the basis of a shared data system to track the effectiveness of collective impact efforts across Somerville.

Collective impact also depends on formal or backbone support for shared objectives. *By All Means* and the Somerville Community Cabinet have allowed Somerville to strengthen and formalize collaboration across city departments, including a close working partnership between the mayor’s office, SPS, and HHS.⁵ The Community Cabinet also has provided an external management operation for the effort, and a shared measurement system for tracking success. Our cabinet’s early shared measurements are found in Appendix C.

Challenges of Collective Impact

Several gaps and challenges, evident in the research on the collective impact model, can be seen in Somerville’s efforts. The relative nascence and varying definitions of collective impact point to a number of challenges for effective implementation of the model. These include the initial time and effort to create an effective coalition, misaligned partner incentives, limited research on sustainability strategies, and few effective measurement systems.

In the Somerville context, a major challenge concerns sustaining the “backbone organization,” which, as Kania and Kramer (2011) point out, is necessary to support fidelity across groups. For the past two years, the *By All Means* project has motivated and held accountable Somerville’s Community Cabinet as the backbone organization for collective impact for OST. Sustaining the Community Cabinet into the future will require

⁵ For example, HHS has funded the permanent placement of school nurses and health clinics in every Somerville public school. SPS and HHS partnered to use a Council on Aging van as an afterschool shuttle.

an ongoing commitment of funds, stable political leadership, and an independent intermediary organization.

Moreover, Somerville faces hurdles in moving from ideation to implementation. A central objective of collective impact and cross-sector collaboration is to align the work of disparate partners around common goals, but many campaigns seem to dedicate most of their resources to this effort, such that little remains to implement projects once aligned (Easterling, 2013). Collective action literature also appears to be more focused on understanding the creation of shared initiatives than on concrete models for implementation. Our experience with the Somerville Community Cabinet has not been different; setting shared, actionable goals has been a significant challenge and we have had trouble moving from goals to coordinated action plans and implementation strategies. This is a common issue when one constituent perceives another as lacking necessary resources or competences for effective implementation (McLaughlin & London, 2013). In Somerville, we have begun to have conversations about how shared resources can be leveraged to support a more comprehensive approach to OST. This is the first year that Somerville will attempt to jointly fund a few positions, most importantly the new OST director, from both city and school budgets.

In addition, many collective impact efforts have paid little attention to the challenges of coordinating data platforms, the costs of maintaining these systems, and questions of how different partners interpret and utilize the same data. The Somerville Community Cabinet has some expertise in these areas, but Mayor Joseph Curtatone has

driven the development and retention of this expertise, and if he leaves office this may dissipate.

Though Somerville has a manageable city size and committed leadership, implementing collective impact in an urban setting can also be particularly challenging. As Bryk and Schneider (2003) note, it is much harder to create conditions of trust and coherence in city settings and urban school districts than in suburban or rural school settings. These are complex political environments with diverse stakeholder needs. Urban school districts, like SPS, also exist within larger institutional environments that are often turbulent, unstable, and potentially undermining of new initiatives (Payne, 2008). In Somerville, the presidency of Donald Trump has complicated and destabilized our efforts, as threats to punish sanctuary cities and cut federal education funding loom.

Perhaps most significantly, collective impact can be successful at overcoming inequities only if stakeholders forge their effort through an active and inclusive democratic process, with participation and leadership by historically marginalized groups. Effective civic participation involves the community in co-commissioning, co-designing, and co-delivering local government services. At present, the Somerville Community Cabinet represents a generally government-centric approach to collective impact with limited co-creation by residents or community groups. During my residency, I successfully advocated and secured funding for a public community visioning campaign, which will run through spring 2019. As of this writing, it remains to be seen how this visioning process will translate to broader public participation and civic engagement, particularly with groups who face racial and economic inequities.

Theory of Action

Somerville's leadership is committed to cross-collaborative approaches to governance through efforts like SomerVision, SomerStat, and the Community Cabinet. Despite this, OST programs have grown organically and without much coordination across the city. Where parent demand and resources have allowed, afterschool and summer options have sprung up to meet need. As a result, many options are not widely accessible or equitable. Somerville currently has at least 44 afterschool providers working independently across the city, concentrated in areas where demand is highest (internal analysis). These providers have been focused primarily on providing childcare for working parents who need coverage during the full workday. Though demand for afterschool services has accelerated for both high- and low-income families, as Somerville's cost of living has risen rapidly, low-income families have significantly less access to quality afterschool programs than their more affluent counterparts.

The goal of my strategic project is to lead a collective impact effort that convenes and supports youth-serving organizations throughout Somerville to increase access, equity, and innovation for all kids. Through the Community Cabinet, we have political authorization to develop a coordinated approach that can potentially bring new resources to support this effort. We have seen some increases in philanthropic funding, but these could be strengthened with increases in local funding as well.

Improving access to quality OST programs is well-aligned with the collective impact model for a number of reasons. First, OST definitionally requires a coordinated approach because it does not fit neatly into defined roles for the school department or

HHS. Second, economically and racially diverse constituents have an interest in accessible OST options. Third, high-quality offerings are not broadly accessible. Race- and income-based disparities in afterschool programs reflect this reality.

Moreover, there is no question that OST offerings can be improved to better serve the needs of students, in terms of both quality and access. In the past, the OST focus has largely been on childcare coverage and not on academic support or student enrichment. And little attention has been paid to systemic barriers to access such as transportation, language, and affordability. By examining these dynamics through a collective lens, the Community Cabinet saw an opportunity for system reform. And we are now making the case to the School Committee and Board of Aldermen for better coordination and investment, aided by the reality that nearly all parents and guardians have a need to find childcare beyond the school day regardless of economic circumstance.

With this context in mind, the following theory of action has guided my efforts:

If we...

- mobilize an inclusive collective impact effort among district, city, and community leaders in Somerville;
- establish shared priorities and leadership goals for the community, including diverse stakeholders and marginalized groups; and
- commit to a mixed-delivery model that extends learning opportunities beyond the school day to more students;

and if we...

- understand the needs and challenges that caretakers and students face in accessing quality OST programming;
- facilitate communication across knowledge and hierarchical boundaries by developing an effective communication system; and

- build capacity and break down barriers between OST practitioners;

then we will...

- gain diverse community and parent support for this mixed-delivery effort;
- accelerate closure of opportunity gaps among student populations;
- improve access to high-quality out of school learning, which will ultimately lead to greater school success; and
- help maintain the authentic diversity and progressive character that is core to Somerville's community.

Chapter II. Strategic Project

Located directly northwest of Boston, Somerville is four square miles and has a growing population of roughly 81,000—up from around 75,000 five years ago. Somerville is the most densely populated city in New England. The recent growth of the city comes in large part from young professionals moving closer to Boston and Cambridge for graduate school, teaching hospitals, and jobs in finance, biotech, and other professional industries. Between 2000 and 2015, Somerville’s population increased by only 1%, but the number of 20- to 34-year-olds increased by 9% (Vance & Ciurczak, 2017).⁶ This rapid rise in young professionals is driving Somerville’s gentrification, and at the same time these are the parents or future parents who will have to consider whether to enroll their children in SPS.

Somerville Public School District currently serves 4,931 students across 11 schools. Of the student population, 60% are high needs, 49% are non-native English speakers, and 39% are economically disadvantaged (Massachusetts DESE, 2017). Figure 4 highlights the demographics of the Somerville school population, which are significantly different than those of the overall city population. The White population in SPS was 37% in 2017, with a rise in the Hispanic/Latino population to 43%, much higher than the state level of 19% (Cambridge Health Alliance, 2017). Since 1994, Somerville’s enrollment has fallen by 26%—a drop of 1,711 students.⁷ In the last five years, however,

⁶ Somerville’s pattern reflects an overall trend in the Boston area, as the city of Boston now has the highest concentration of millennials among the 25 largest U.S. cities.

⁷ During that time, Prospect Hill Academy Charter School opened and now serves nearly 500 students, mostly students of color.

enrollment has ticked upwards at the same time that birth rates for city residents have reached their highest levels in decades.

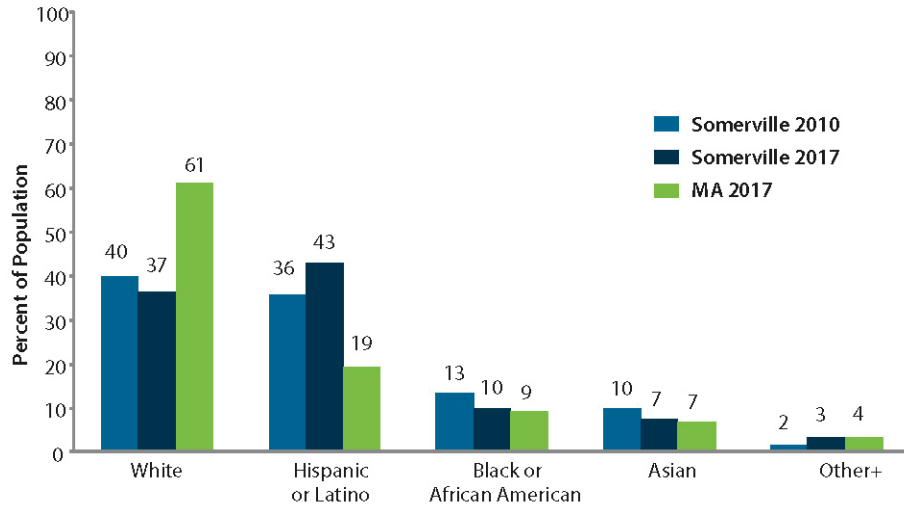


Figure 4. Diversity in Somerville Public Schools 2010 and 2017. Reprinted from The Wellbeing of Somerville Report (p. 46), 2017, Somerville, MA: Cambridge Health Alliance. Copyright 2017 by the Cambridge Health Alliance. Reprinted with permission.

The rising birth rate has not yet significantly affected the number of households with school-age children. This figure has been flat in part because a growing millennial population and the city’s rising popularity have driven property values higher, pricing out some younger and working-class families. At the same time, those young adults who moved to Somerville because of its walkable urban character are now forming families and having children. My own family, with two preschool-age children, is among that cohort of young professional transplants. Migration patterns have shifted the city’s population from older to younger and from poor and middle-class to wealthier families. Somerville remains a gateway city as well, serving as home to various immigrant populations. Fully 25% of Somerville’s citizens were not born in the United States,

significantly higher than the state average of 7%. More than 52 languages are spoken at home by students enrolled in SPS (Cambridge Health Alliance, 2017). The most common languages spoken at home by Somerville students are detailed in Figure 5.

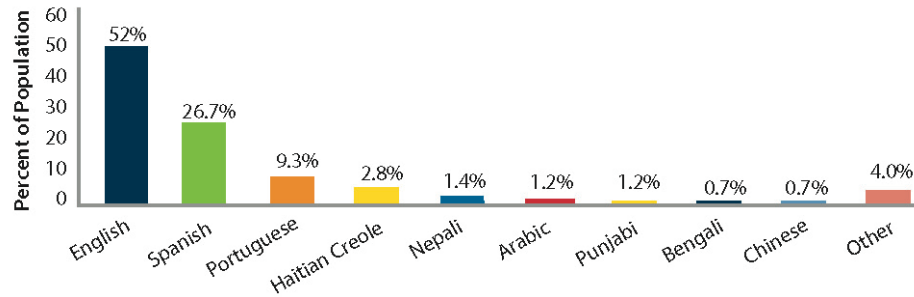


Figure 5. Somerville Public School Students Primary Language Spoken at Home. Reprinted from *The Wellbeing of Somerville Report*, (p. 47), 2017 Somerville, MA: Cambridge Health Alliance. Copyright 2017 by the Cambridge Health Alliance. Reprinted with permission.

Project Description

With rising educational demands and contractual limits to school hours, national attention is turning to the experiences of children and youth in their out of school time. Preschool, afterschool, weekend, and summer programs offer many opportunities to complement and enhance the learning that takes place in school. These programs include promising strategies for engaging children and youth in a variety of positive social, recreational, and academic activities. Quality OST options also foster relationships across lines of difference—allowing young people more opportunities to connect with each other positively and meaningfully.

The Somerville OST landscape is made up of a mix of public, private, and nonprofit programs that serve roughly one in four district students (SPS district survey).

The decentralized and fragmented nature of afterschool providers in Somerville has been a mixed blessing for the city. On the positive side, Somerville is brimming with afterschool options of various sizes and focuses, which creates an appealing menu of options for families. Programs are generally community-based and aim to serve student needs with limited staff overhead. Other than the challenges of space and rent, there are few barriers to new programs opening up within the city. On the other hand, there is considerable variability in the hours of operation, cost, financial assistance, ages served, availability of transportation, activities and curriculum, staff credentials, availability of meals and snacks, and facilities. With Parks & Recreation programs, school clubs, and independent providers, it is difficult to understand the entire landscape of afterschool and summer options across the city.

Somerville's lack of a coordinated and integrated opportunity system for OST learning has caused parents and caregivers to have insufficient information about and inadequate access to affordable, high-quality afterschool and summer programming for their students. These coverage gaps are greatest for low-income and high-risk children. For example, the district's largest elementary afterschool program, Community Schools, which uses a fee-for-service model, has historically served higher percentages of students in the city's more affluent neighborhoods (see Appendix D). As Somerville becomes more economically stratified, this "enrichment gap" is likely to increase unless our community makes a deliberate effort to address it.

My strategic project seeks to address this problem by (a) understanding the current afterschool and summer programming landscape in Somerville; (b) convening

citizens, city and school officials, and providers around a shared mission; (c) drafting a comprehensive strategic plan to address gaps, increase access, and improve quality; and (d) building community capacity to drive the work and sustain it after my residency is complete.

At the start of my residency, my objective was to build an information tracking system to understand where children are enrolled in afterschool programs and what parents want in terms of additional afterschool and summer options. I created a parent survey to better understand the current landscape, enrollment gaps, and future programming wishes of caregivers. In partnership with SomerPromise, which supports citywide cradle-to-career initiatives, I developed a spreadsheet of all of the current afterschool and summer programs in and around Somerville along with known enrollment information. The district's data analyst, Kenya Avont-Ransome, and I looked at enrollment patterns and demographic trends among the current afterschool programs.

Based on the gathered data, I led meetings with district and city leadership to understand their OST goals and gather their reactions to the enrollment trends. I also engaged the *By All Means* Community Cabinet in this process and conducted follow-up interviews with some Somerville parents and students to further understand their experiences and challenges.

I then started to work incrementally toward addressing identified gaps. For example, gaps in programming are the most acute in the middle and high school grades. Until recently, most OST programming in Somerville has focused on serving elementary-age children, with less attention paid to middle and high school-age students. At an age

when they are beginning to become more independent, tweens and teens still need some structure and guidance. Increasingly, stakeholders in the OST arena are coming to see afterschool programs as an underutilized asset to improve academic, social-emotional, and workforce readiness outcomes for older youth. We thus prioritized and supported new partnerships with Citizen Schools, Breakthrough Greater Boston, and Boston Debate League, all of which exclusively recruit and serve middle and high school students.

I also examined the district's transportation system, including piloting a new afterschool shuttle, which helps a dozen students access the *El Sistema* music program at East Somerville Community School and serves as a proof of concept that better transportation will open avenues to more participation. This shuttle pilot came with a \$25,000 appropriation from the SPS School Committee and assurance from our finance director that those funds would cover the annual cost. The actual implementation of the shuttle, however, revealed systemic transportation issues that the district must overcome to provide better transportation. This has led to a wholesale examination of the district's bus system, a growing budget line without a centralized coordinator.

I have also worked on improving the information and services that parents can access through a single point of entry. With more than 40 afterschool and summer programs, a number likely to grow because of our efforts, it is too much to ask all parents to research and determine enrollment eligibility for all possible OST options. Nearly half of Somerville parents expressed interest in greater coordination among afterschool options, according to a recent district survey. For parents with limited money, time, education, and/or English language skills, navigating this patchwork of programs may be

nearly impossible, one of many reasons these programs tend to serve more higher income families than their lower income and minority counterparts. My specific recommendations for a single port of entry are to utilize the district’s online registration system, InfoSnap, and annual data collection process (e.g., parent contact, free and reduced lunch form), platforms that have never been examined for Somerville OST options at the city level.

My residency will culminate in a series of recommendations for school and city officials, specifically around how to continue to add new OST partners to the overall mixed-delivery landscape in Somerville; improve transportation, registration, and other barriers to access; examine enrollment inequities and fund student scholarships; and continue to leverage cross-sector collaboration and community engagement and leadership for a deliberate and comprehensive approach to OST.

Theory of Action in Practice

Using the four points of engagement for the strategic project—the Community Cabinet, the OST Taskforce, the Somerville Education Foundation (SEF), and the community visioning project—this section examines the efficacy of the theory of action for my residency: collective impact for a comprehensive, mixed-delivery, out of school learning system that will increase access, equity, and innovation for all of Somerville’s students.

Somerville Community Cabinet

The first aspect of my strategic project focused on managing the Somerville Community Cabinet to marshal political and financial authorization for expanding OST

opportunities. We managed to achieve active monthly participation across 10 city agencies including the school district, HHS, Head Start, and Parks & Recreation—all of which support Somerville students. We had consistent representation and participation by Mayor Curtatone, Superintendent Skipper, and HHS Director Kress at our monthly cabinet meetings.

Table 1.

Somerville Community Cabinet Membership

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistant Superintendent, Somerville Public Schools • Biogen Representative • Data Director, Somerville Public Schools • Director of Communications and Grants, Somerville Public Schools • Director of Early Education, Somerville Public Schools • Director of English Language Learner Programs & Community Outreach, Somerville Public Schools • Director, Health & Human Services Department • Director, Parks & Recreation • Director, Somerville Community Health Agenda, Cambridge Health Alliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director, Somerville Family Learning Collaborative • Executive Director of Community Action Agency of Somerville (oversees Head Start) • Mayor's Chief of Staff • Microsoft Representative • Somerville Mayor • Superintendent, Somerville Public Schools • Superintendent Fellow & Harvard Resident • School Committee Chair • Two School Committee Members • SomerPromise Director
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The Community Cabinet has generally been a positive mechanism for helping city and community leaders understand and solve multifaceted challenges. Much of this

success should be credited to Mayor Curtatone, Superintendent Skipper, and HHS Director Kress, who have consistently prioritized their participation and embraced a collective impact approach to their work. The mayor has repeatedly said in cabinet meetings that “student learning and development is all of our responsibility,” setting a tone of dedication to collective impact. The presence of Curtatone, Skipper, and Kress together has also made these meetings productive in very concrete ways, since some decisions require all of their approval, and they rarely have time to be in the same room.

Through the cabinet, we have launched online pre-K program registration in advance of the 2017-2018 school year. Somerville will expand online registration to include the district’s largest afterschool program, Community Schools, in 2018-2019. We have doubled pre-K afterschool coverage from 20% to 40% in two years, meeting a strong need for students of working parents. The cabinet’s work also led SPS to invest nearly \$1 million to expand Breakthrough Greater Boston, which will serve 300 students by 2022-2023. Breakthrough will contribute \$2 million independently to support their intensive cohort model. A \$200,000 lead investment from the Biogen Foundation allowed Somerville to create a similar partnership with Citizen Schools. Citizen Schools has committed to raising an additional \$600,000 in supporting funds to expand their program in Somerville over the next three years. Currently, the Citizen Schools program focuses on East Somerville Community School (ESCS) students in Grades 5 and 6 for the initial year of the partnership, with plans to expand to Grades 7 and 8 in the next two years. The program provides an additional enrichment opportunity and academic support to assist students in their important transition into middle school and then high school. Nearly 80

ESCS students signed up for Citizen Schools in the first year of the program, and we will expand this offering next year.

These successes have created momentum, catalyzing more engagement. The cabinet has offered members a wider lens on how we might serve all students and pushed the group towards a more inclusive and civic conception. By co-creating a common agenda and meeting regularly with leaders beyond our usual domains, we have developed trust and a shared creed around expanding access to opportunity and reducing inequity. We have also attracted more than a half million dollars in outside investment over two years, including most recently a \$100,000 grant from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation to underwrite the community visioning process.

The cabinet has also led to the formation and cultivation of critically important relationships. As an example, when the school department moved to pilot the *El Sistema* afterschool shuttle, our preferred bus company could not guarantee a shuttle at the needed time and was going to charge far more than the budget for the project allowed. Because of the relationship and trust I had developed with HHS Director Doug Kress through our work on the cabinet, I was able to call him and convince him to lend us a van from his Council on Aging fleet that would cost us little more than the price of gas. I have developed similar relationships with most members of the cabinet, and in fact, I regularly text and talk with a number of city officials outside the school department. Building and sustaining these relationships requires both an investment of time and a continuity of leadership that we have been fortunate to have in Somerville.

The Community Cabinet has, however, had a number of challenges and shortfalls. The first was a significant gap between the rhetoric around expanding OST programs and the resources invested towards that goal. The mayor often urged us to be more ambitious in our goals for afterschool and summer programming and to work to ensure that new and existing programs are free for all students. A quick examination of city investments in existing afterschool programs, however, shows that we have a long way to go toward this vision. For example, Community Schools, which serves the most afterschool students in Somerville, receives no city funding and instead must raise its own revenue by charging a large majority of students full tuition (\$120 per week). This system has led to significant, yet predictable, disparities in the students who access Community Schools as evidenced in Table 2.

Table 2.

Somerville Pre-K to Grade 8 School Populations

Somerville School	Student Population	Economically Disadvantaged %	Community Schools Enrolled %
East Somerville	713	80%	14%
Winter Hill	458	78%	18%
Healey	446	61%	20%
Argenziano	589	57%	28%
West Somerville	371	53%	34%
Capuano	321	48%	29%

Kennedy	454	41%	24%
Brown	230	18%	49%
Total/Avg.	3,582	59%	26%

At times, cabinet members did not always have (or even aspire to) a shared vision for collaborative work. In a system with limited resources and intense stress, some people naturally seek direction from the more limited scope of their role, department, or organization. Though it's common to bemoan siloed work environments, large systems like public school districts benefit from them in some respects. The work of ensuring every child in Somerville has opportunity regardless of race or class can feel limitless and overwhelming; silos allow public servants to focus on what they can do. Yet silos can limit the collective effort, making it difficult to combine our strength. As an example, one cabinet member, a high-ranking school official, asked me earnestly and without irony why I took meetings at City Hall or worked with *city* officials. I regularly encountered this view among school staff, that the school district was somehow distinct from and not accountable to the city government. Another time, a city employee complained that the mayor's office had granted the school district an excess of resources and support at her department's expense. There seemed to be a strong cultural desire to highlight and work within department boundaries, despite an explicit or implicit understanding that challenges could not be addressed by one government function alone.

It was also difficult to limit cabinet membership to those who were invested in the focus of our work. Historically, the cabinet was not solely focused on out of school time

and its membership reflected a broader mission. As the cabinet's work grew more focused on OST, there was little political courage to restructure membership, even for those members who no longer had an active role. Because the mayor and superintendent were in the room at the same time with other directors, people wanted to be in the meetings even if they had little to contribute to the substantive area we were addressing. Political reluctance to encourage obsolete members to step away from the cabinet made it difficult to invite new members who might have a more direct impact on our efforts.

Finally, the Community Cabinet lacked diversity in some important ways—particularly in drawing leaders of color and community members outside of government. Only four out of 22, including me, were not government officials. This last challenge was part of the reason that I felt it was important to publicize our work and try to get more community members involved in providing meaningful input through an organized community engagement process. That's what I hope our upcoming visioning process will do.

Out of School Time Taskforce

The OST Taskforce was launched in fall 2017 to serve as an intermediary and build connections between providers, schools, and city leaders to support the afterschool and summer needs of Somerville's young people. My colleague SomerPromise Director Anna Fox Doherty and I invited leaders of more than 40 afterschool and summer programs to join us for monthly meetings. Since launch, these meetings have grown in size and attracted new members interested in working together to better serve Somerville students. We have offered avenues for collective advocacy and professional development

to a group that usually receives few resources and less attention from government relative to the school system.

The meetings have drawn new partners, like Citizen Schools and Calculus Project, that are helping to close an enrollment gap in OST programs for students of color in the middle grades. The combination of these new programs has added 140 free, high-quality programming slots for underserved students. A newly elected Board of Aldermen member, Stephanie Hirsch, has started to attend and publicly advocate for the resource priorities recommended by the taskforce. Primary among these is a full-time OST director who can support, coordinate, and advocate for the programs, similarly to the district's director of Early Childhood Education. The other priority that members have consistently raised is the need for improved shuttle service, so students can access more options without needing to walk year-round or rely on public or family transportation.

I have been working with city and school officials to include both of these priorities in the FY2019 budget. We have developed a job description for the OST director and have support for this position from Mayor Curtatone, Superintendent Skipper, and Alderman-At-Large Hirsch. I have also been working with the mayor's chief of staff on a proposal for city-funded shuttles to allow students to access afterschool programs and intermural options beyond their neighborhood schools. This proposal has strong support from the heads of the Parks & Recreation and Athletics Departments.

With Alderman Hirsch, I have developed an OST equity report to track enrollment trends across programs. Analyzing the city's three largest school-based afterschool programs, Community Schools, Citizen Schools, and *El Sistema*, revealed

some troubling findings. Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch were enrolled at half the level of other students. These disparities were particularly acute at particular schools, with ratios of 4 to 1 at West Somerville and Kennedy Elementary, which are in the more affluent and less diverse section of the city, and 3 to 1 at Argenziano and Capuano, which are gentrifying ahead of the planned Green Line MBTA extension. Likely reflecting these new development trends, disparities are particularly acute in Grades pre-K–3. Community Schools dominates enrollment, serving 81% of the students in the largest three programs, and it has the starkest disparities of the three. This report has been shared with the Community Cabinet, OST Taskforce, and School Committee as the basis for increased budget requests for FY2019.

The Somerville Education Foundation

Creating a city-wide community foundation put Somerville in the company of several nearby cities, including Arlington, Cambridge, Medford, Revere, and Salem. The first objective of the foundation was to create a financial backstop and motivational force for the *By All Means* Community Cabinet work when our Harvard funding expires (expected in May 2018). I had learned that Somerville’s politicians had little political appetite for asking well-resourced new arrivals to contribute to an equity agenda for students. Politicians were not willing to approach residents for funds that will ultimately be needed when our Harvard *By All Means* grant is complete. The Somerville Education Foundation might provide such a vehicle for fundraising and potentially as a source of motivation and accountability for the cabinet’s work.

My second priority in helping to launch the Somerville Education Foundation was to try to intellectually engage parents of means alongside representatives of more disadvantaged residents in an equity agenda. Talking to senior district leaders, it was clear that most of the more affluent parents with whom they had direct contact were viewed, at best, as bothersome—people who were looking for concessions or exceptions for their own already advantaged children. Given the fact that district leaders had to address the influence of homelessness, food insecurity, domestic abuse and assault, and even prostitution in students' lives, I could hardly blame administrators for being resentful of parent advocacy for students facing none of these problems. I felt that a foundation could help more affluent parents see the broader challenges in the district and give them a chance to be a part of addressing the problems facing less advantaged students.

We launched the Somerville Education Foundation with five members initially, including one community member who was particularly polarizing for many school and city administrators. This individual had pulled his children out of public school a few times to homeschool them, citing teaching and behavior challenges at the neighborhood schools. My initial attempt to have the SEF leaders and Committee Cabinet meet backfired, with four members of the cabinet seeking me out individually to protest the presence of this particular person.

Despite this early setback, we managed to diversify the board and allay some concerns about the purpose of the group. A bilingual, rising star principal, as well as the head of the tenant association for Somerville's largest housing development, have since

joined the SEF Board. We held weekly 8:00 a.m. conference calls and hosted monthly community events to build awareness about the foundation. The group took a leadership role in helping to draft some of the proposal for a Nellie Mae grant in which we were awarded \$100,000 for our community visioning process. With a broader board, the group has focused on equity and inclusivity—and agreed to wait until the community visioning process is complete before making significant investments.

This has begun to establish more goodwill between the foundation board and political leaders, including some on the cabinet who were originally quite hostile. In February 2018, Abby and I hosted a social event with the foundation board, Community Cabinet, and School Committee members at our house that went much better than the original attempt to bring these groups together. Although Superintendent Skipper was recovering from a medical procedure, most of School Committee and Mayor Curtatone came and the evening helped build goodwill between groups who would likely benefit from working together. The foundation has applied for 501(c)3 status and started raising money which can be used to support the community priorities that arise from the visioning campaign. The event also led the Board of Aldermen and School Committee to consider joint funding for the OST director position, which might co-report to the superintendent and the HHS director.

Community Visioning

As we looked ahead to the potential end of the *By All Means* support in May 2018 and reflected on our own composition, the cabinet grew eager to discuss public participation, support, and sustainability. There was widespread agreement that

significant progress had been made, particularly in expanding early childhood and OST options for underserved students, but that we would need to leverage more community engagement to build on and sustain our achievements. Our solution is to take the cabinet's efforts out to the community in a series of public visioning conversations, which we are tentatively calling SomerVision for Learning. These meetings will challenge the community to think about what an opportunity agenda for all students might look like in 2025 or 2030. Our goal is to get beyond the immediate political debates of the day and ask parents and community members to set a big vision for what it should be mean to grow up in Somerville. This longer vision will be coupled with short- and medium-term benchmarks so that we have immediate opportunities for people to contribute to this collective progress.

This effort stems from the belief that one of Somerville's greatest assets is our residents: a diverse, creative, and optimistic group who care deeply about their community and about an equity agenda. The visioning campaign will explore areas of consensus and long-range prioritization around learning and personal development. It will set long-range goals for the city, school district, and HHS Department around learning and well-being.

The hope of this campaign is that it will continue in the successful tradition of the city's 2011 SomerVision Comprehensive Plan. SomerVision documented three years of shared learning between residents, business owners, nonprofit groups, and public officials. SomerVision now serves as a guide for future growth and development in the city. It provides a policy framework for other planning efforts, including neighborhood

development and capital plans. The plan sets big goals for the city, including 125 new acres of open space and 6,000 units of new housing by 2030 (SomervilleVision, 2010-2030).

We are now ready to continue that community conversation with a focus on learning and personal development for our children and youth, which was not part of the original mission of SomervilleVision. My belief is that this represents a natural extension of SomervilleVision, a sustainability path for *By All Means*, and a way to increase access to opportunities and better economic outcomes delivered through an active democratic process.

The visioning project has been endorsed by the Somerville Community Cabinet, which will form the backbone for the work. The Somerville Education Foundation and SomervillePromise also stand ready to support this community-driven, long-range planning effort through in-kind and financial investment. The primary goals and deliverables that we expect will be part of the SomervilleVision for Learning campaign are found in Appendix E.

Analysis: Institutional Challenges to Collective Impact

This section analyzes institutional challenges that have impacted the progress of our collective impact approach to OST planning and suggests ways in which we have and can overcome these barriers moving forward. Prioritizing equity, balancing competing priorities, and integrating reform into the existing governing culture have all been significant challenges for me in taking on this project. I have had some success in each of these areas, but more needs to be done.

Barriers to Prioritizing Equity

The broad-based economic strain on Somerville's residents provides political motivation to expand OST opportunities, as the affordability crisis is seen as significant enough to merit new approaches and investments to ameliorate it. Conversely, competing political pressures, institutionalized inequity, and the fact that Somerville already has a patchwork of historically rooted OST offerings are challenges to disrupting the status quo and to putting equity at the center of our work.

As an example, the district's largest afterschool provider, Community Schools, serves more than 700 primarily upper-income students, and its current operating practices have a base of support among parents of those students and the people who represent them. This has led to barriers to equity-minded reform. In the spring of 2017, for example, the program administration proposed raising weekly fees in FY2018 for families at the top income levels in order to provide more support for disadvantaged students. Senior members of the district and city administration rejected this proposal, arguing that access and affordability is a central concern for families at every income level.

Moreover, because the Community Schools program has a self-sufficient business model, implicit pressures remain to keep it focused on higher income students, despite widespread agreement, including among the program's leadership, that it should serve students more equitably. In September 2017, the revolving account on which the program depends ran a deficit, which was predictable given growth in the program at the lower income levels. Unable to get an emergency funding appropriation, the program shifted its enrollment strategy towards taking more full-paying students and decreasing the

subsidies available to students in need. Table 3 shows the resulting decline in overall scholarship funding, as well as a drop in the number of students receiving support.

Table 3.

Community Schools Annual Subsidies Comparison

School Year	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18*
Students Subsidized	155	162	120 (26%↓)
Total Subsidy	\$194,723	\$188,570	\$167,559 (11%↓)

Note. * Year sliding scale is implemented in an attempt to achieve more equitable access.

We have implemented some pilot programs to increase student access to Community Schools, such as the ELL Language Builders Club this year, but expanding these incrementally will not address the underlying systemic flaws with the model and will be difficult in the current budget climate. This is a fight that I am taking up again with key School Committee and Board of Aldermen members as we begin to shape FY2019 budget appropriations.

Since there was not political will to reform the largest provider of OST care in the city, the cabinet and school district have added new programming options to supplement system deficiencies. Citizen Schools, Breakthrough, and Boston Debate League are all new partners that predominantly serve economically disadvantaged students. These new programs operate at the East Somerville and Argenziano schools, which have few economically disadvantaged students in their existing Community Schools afterschool programs. While this strategy increases access to services at those schools where low income students are underserved, it was not undertaken as part of a broader reform of the

underlying system. As a result, the strategy unintentionally reinforces a pattern of segregation by race and class between afterschool programs and across schools as seen in Table 4. This will never change unless the community supports a difficult process of more systemic reform aimed at specifically addressing the problem.

Table 4.

Student Enrollment and Free & Reduced (F&R) Price Lunch Eligibility Within SPS Afterschool Programs

Afterschool Program	F&R Eligible	Not Eligible	Total	% F&R
Community Schools	222	421	643	35%
<i>El Sistema</i>	53	31	84	63%
Citizen Schools	37	6	43*	86%
Breakthrough	44	6	50	88%
Total/Avg.	356	464	770	46%

Note. *Only includes partial Citizen Schools enrollment; total enrollment is 75 students.

It has been even more difficult to ensure that equity is prioritized in the Somerville Education Foundation’s work. My fellow board members, who are predominately affluent and from West Somerville neighborhoods, had a difficult time understanding the level of trauma and basic needs many of our students face. Our early strategy conversations centered on expanding robotics and computer science opportunities for more students, and it took significant effort to help them understand that some Somerville students face more fundamental barriers to learning.

The OST Taskforce, which includes leaders of programs that serve more disadvantaged students, has been a more fruitful setting for difficult conversations about systemic racial and class disparities. Their recommendations reflect these discussions in important ways. However, the taskforce has little political power and cannot rely on a recurring budget line from the city or school district. Further integrating voices such as those of the OST Taskforce into the cabinet’s conversations will be critically important if we are to take on more systemic reform.

I also believe that the mayor and superintendent can be more forceful in holding central the equity goals of this work. One model for this is the recently announced plan of London Mayor Sadiq Khan, who has championed “All of Us”—a strategy for social integration at the city level (Greater London Authority, 2018). This campaign holds that building bonds of trust and belonging are fundamental steps to creating more successful, resilient, and equitable cities. Social integration strategy promotes more opportunities for people to connect with each other meaningfully and positively. While this holds much promise and some similarities with our OST opportunity campaign, it requires not just city leadership but real participation, across lines of difference, from residents across the community. People must have ample opportunities to become involved in the decisions that affect them. I am hopeful that our visioning project will start us down this path.

Competing Priorities

Somerville is fortunate to be of a size where coordinated afterschool and summer programming should be manageable, but it has to be made a real priority. Even where

there is agreement around needed change, it can be difficult to prioritize strategic planning in the face of more immediately pressing concerns.

The competing pressures I often felt in my position are a good example of this. My position was created for the residency, and I was the first person in city government to concentrate on OST coordination in the district. Ostensibly this was my primary focus, but my time became increasingly fragmented across projects, which both augmented and limited my effectiveness. Superintendent Skipper's dynamic work style and willingness to try many different initiatives led her to invite me to contribute to projects ranging from food insecurity to the School Committee's long-range planning, from school recycling to Rules Committee, from facilities repair to state policy advocacy, and from capital planning to supporting teachers of color at Somerville High School. Like everyone at SPS, I also was inevitably drawn into daily challenges faced by the district. It was thus not uncommon to leave a meeting with the mayor or mayor's chief of staff to be a bus monitor or track down a student's missing saxophone left on a shuttle. My lack of role definition, while allowing great flexibility and giving me insight into important related systems, made it difficult for me to maintain a dedicated focus on a long-range plan for OST providers.

In many ways, the distance between my expected role and the reality of the work reflected a challenge SPS and the city itself face: there is often a gap between rhetoric and the reality of implementation. From the beginning of my residency when I was asked to implement the afterschool shuttle pilot, it was clear that key initiatives had not been fully considered and resourced in advance. Despite dedicated School Committee funding,

no one had called bus companies to verify shuttle availability or cost. Similarly, there seemed to have been no discussion of which students should be eligible to ride—or the effect on the district’s other shuttles. The district’s three ELL buses had a policy of taking students only until age 12, but the afterschool shuttle was supposed to serve primarily middle school students. I myself found it difficult to fully consider the consequences when it became necessary to implement new initiatives because my attention was increasingly divided across many projects.

I continue to believe that formalized focal points to hold the institutional players accountable, such as the Community Cabinet, the OST Taskforce, the Somerville Education Foundation, and the visioning project, are a major part of the solution for OST to overcome barriers that stem from competing priorities and immediate needs. For this reason, I have focused the end of my residency on sustainability for these points of focus and accountability.

Cultural Challenges

Because I was new to school administration and city government, my work also often came upon unexpected challenges due to cultural challenges and unwritten rules that I did not foresee. MIT’s Edgar Schein defines culture as “a learned result of a group experience” (Christensen & Shu, 2006), and as I was new to the group, there were areas in which I did not understand the cultural norms at play. In an early example, I organized a press event with some of the Community Cabinet to recognize the launch of our partnership with Citizen Schools. While the mayor and superintendent encouraged this initiative, the SPS communications director reprimanded me lightly for not informing her

office before planning the event. In another instance, when I suggested that we alter the way Rules Committee prioritized work, the person who had primarily managed that system before me felt threatened and stopped copying me on email communications related to the committee's work. Changing practices in general was fraught with these types of potential pitfalls.

As my work progressed, I noticed that two key influences tended to generally move work at SPS: positional authority and personal relationships. If the superintendent gave the directive, generally people would listen and take action. Yet there were limits to even this approach. More than one director-level leader told me that they do not start to work on something unless Superintendent Skipper asks them at least twice. This evidence seems to signal that Mary has too many direct reports (my position pushed that number to 21) and personal leadership responsibilities. It also suggests that the district is probably taking on too many new initiatives if even cabinet members with whole departments are avoiding new work.

Without the superintendent's explicit direction, most important initiatives moved as a result of existing relationships. Superintendent Skipper was extremely generous in offering her time, support, and authority to help me to build such relationships. The few times others questioned whether I should be present at meetings, she clarified to them that I had her invitation and support. After a while, people began to accept and welcome my involvement. I attempted to build my relationships and political authority by taking a humble inquiry stance to new work and offering to support my colleagues as much as possible.

The further my work took me away from the central office, however, the less Superintendent Skipper's support helped me forge new relationships. Thus, I tried to build relationships through the Community Cabinet and keep in regular communication with leaders outside the main office. I had weekly meetings with the city's SomerPromise director and monthly lunches with the HHS director. I sought to help anyone I could, for example bringing an extra air purifier I had at home to a principal who was worried about fumes in his office. In some ways, it helped to have a fluid role and to be working across projects intersecting with not only different departments but city agencies. This provided me with information and connections across the city. Bolman and Deal have argued that in larger governmental systems, "power flows to those with the information and know-how to solve important problems" (2013, p. 203). As I made connections across streams of work and bridged networks of individuals who otherwise had limited or no interaction, many people started to see me as an ally and driver to accomplish things.

Chapter III. Implications for Self, Somerville, and Sector

By March 2018, my strategic project had resulted in some successes in increasing OST programming and some consensus around the need to go even further, but it was not yet clear whether Somerville would commit more resources to close opportunity gaps in out of school time. Preliminary budget conversations and proposals for the city and the school district point to promising increases in investments, but final budgets are still weeks away. In the prior section, I analyzed our progress this year. In the following section, I explore implications for myself as an educational leader, for SPS in the context of a changing city, and for the K–12 education sector as a whole.

Implications for Self

Coming into this role, I did not have any experience working in the administrative office of a school district. I embraced residency as an opportunity to learn more about the mechanics of the system in which the vast majority of U.S. students are educated. Somerville was the only district that I considered because of our local ties and my admiration for Superintendent Skipper. Despite an openness to learning, I came into SPS with a number of pre-conceived notions about the nature and effectiveness of school districts in general. For instance, I expected much of the work to be consensus-driven and slow-moving but instead found a very nimble, almost entrepreneurial system under Mary's leadership. I did not expect, but probably should have, that so much of this fluidity would be in reaction to unforeseen events in schools.

Somerville experienced two tragic shootings this year, including one of a student killed in the evening before the first day of school. Both incidents were extremely

difficult traumas for our students and teachers, particularly those at Somerville High School. The tragic events were a reminder of how much of this work is shaped by forces and incidents outside of a district leader's control. This would become even more apparent as I experienced days disrupted by snow emergency calls, student walkouts, and school power outages. I remain surprised by how difficult it is to set and persist with a particular agenda as part of an urban school district team, even one of relatively manageable size like Somerville.

My work in Somerville affirmed a tension between my preference for systems-level thinking and the satisfaction of working directly with students. I feel most comfortable considering the role of zoning and housing policy on school enrollment trends and program inequities. Restructuring our school transportation system or strategizing on long-range capital planning came easily to me. But to an extent I did not foresee, I came to deeply value riding the afterschool shuttle and getting to know the personal stories of the students on that bus. There were times when making a small connection with one of these students felt like the most important work I had accomplished that day.

Residency has affirmed that I am most comfortable in the diagnostic and problem-solving aspect of work. My natural instinct is to identify, investigate, and try to solve a problem. At the end of that inquiry, I need to have a good understanding of purpose for the project or else I tend to get disillusioned or become disengaged. This was a significant challenge at times, particularly when a project seemed to be one of compliance rather than strategy. For example, one evening at School Committee, an outgoing committee

member asked for an enrollment trend report from the school administration. This responsibility was given to me, and I set about trying to find our enrollment reports and get updated information.

I soon discovered that we did not systematically forecast enrollment between schools over multiple years (itself a problem). It seemed important to know what the intended use of the information was, so I asked the School Committee member. He responded that he just wanted to see all of the school enrollment data. After spending about 20 hours collecting and formatting the data, through multiple revisions, I shared my report. When I received no response or even acknowledgement after a few weeks, I wrote and called the member to see if he had any questions and to make sure this was the information he had wanted. The individual never responded, and the whole exercise felt like a waste of time. The report was created and repeatedly customized for a particular member, and therefore the process and template are not otherwise useful.

Having not worked in a school district before, I had the benefit of approaching the work from a true learning stance. I felt comfortable admitting that there were quite a few processes (and countless acronyms) with which I was not familiar. This openness to learning was helpful as it allowed me to discard some of my assumptions about district operations as I learned more about them. In many ways, this education has shifted my professional theory of action. I realized the power of seeing the breadth and complexity of challenges that our public schools are dealing with, and I think that other parents and community members would similarly benefit from that broader perspective.

How to share that experience is an important question going forward. In my work with the foundation and in whatever role might come next, I want to support social inclusion by offering meaningful interactions. One way we could do this might be to invite parents to shadow a principal for a few hours or volunteer with the Somerville Backpack Program, which delivers free food to low-income students. Another mechanism might be to build more deliberate connections between school intramural and community sports programs. Community engagement through shared experience of volunteering, culture, food, or sports is critical to bringing together Somerville residents from all backgrounds.

Despite my training in the Ed.L.D. program, there were a number of times when I was inadvertently triggered by my colleague's comments. Some comments made clear that people did not like the new population of Somerville transplants—frustration that seemed to sometimes be directed at generally higher income White arrivals and other times seemingly at Central American immigrants. Comments of resentment about the resources and supports that new immigrant students received were troubling from a standpoint of inclusivity. Comments directed against White newcomers were more personally hurtful, given that most people knew that our family was relatively new to Somerville. This also played into concerns about my role in contributing to the gentrification and rising cost in Somerville. There were times when I felt defensive or embarrassed to say that we owned a house in West Somerville, when many of our teachers, staff, and families are being priced out of the city.

To some degree, my theory of change has evolved to fit within my own personal context. I want to believe that, if challenged and exposed to systemic inequities, most Somerville residents will want to take action and perhaps more privileged residents will sacrifice some of their power and resources to address them systemically. Growing up, I had access to strong social capital networks and any afterschool time and summer programming that I needed. I am cautiously optimistic that we can call on the growing wealth and progressivism of Somerville's residents to offer similar learning opportunities to all students. There's some evidence for hope in the recent Board of Aldermen election, in which a number of progressive candidates were elected after campaigning for things like an affordable housing transfer fee.

I also realize my bias is towards public schools as an engine of democratic equity. The civic purpose of education animated the very creation of publicly funded schools. And yet schools are caught between political and economic tensions: the Jeffersonian ideal of political equality and the Hamiltonian reality of economic inequality. My hope in this work is to bring more opportunity for the former to address the latter. Progressive cities like Somerville seem well positioned to be laboratories for positive change. While this objective seems both fair and self-evident, I realize that it is extremely difficult to effectuate.

Implications for Somerville

Superintendent Skipper models an openness to experimentation and productive risk-taking in a way that I have not seen in many other civic leaders. These traits have made my residency an incredibly valuable and productive learning experience. Mayor

Curtatone and most of School Committee share this adaptability and openness to innovation. As with all large systems, however, Somerville and SPS employ some people who do not share these dispositions. Below are some implications for Somerville and SPS that my residency revealed to me.

I found the second level of leaders, unlike Superintendent Skipper and Mayor Curtatone, tended to be more conservative and cautious about reform. The city and district try a lot of new initiatives, and their conservatism may be an understandable side effect of fatigue with continual change. The result, however, is an administrative cautiousness, resistance to reform, and tendency to withhold troubling information from outside parties (including the School Committee and parents). My sense is that many cabinet-level leaders are primarily concerned about the district's public narrative and look to avoid attention on areas in need of improvement. This was certainly my experience when it came to reforming Community Schools or systematically addressing district transportation patterns. That stance, however, means the district alone is unlikely to build political will to address real and deep problems. We will not adequately address racial disparities in transportation, suspension, or afterschool enrollment unless these problems are publicly shared and approached as collective challenges to resolve.

Somerville leadership, in particular Superintendent Skipper and School Committee Chair Andre Green, have made strides towards putting race and equity at the center of the district's work. Mary asked me to join the central team focused on another Harvard initiative called Reimagining Integration in Diverse and Equitable Schools, or RIDES. But the promise of this work and the reality of actual change again reinforced the

gap between rhetoric and reality of implementation. There is commitment from the superintendent and Assistant Superintendent Almi Abeyta to this initiative, but that commitment is not translating to real change from the director-level staff directly below them, let alone those staff two or three times removed.

Perhaps because of my residency role and the capstone process, I found myself observing and questioning the underlying reasons and motivations behind certain priorities. Having little district experience with which to compare, I regularly asked why we did things a certain way. Often the answer was tautological: because that's how it has always been done. I think this points to a need for greater staff diversity, something that would benefit many urban school districts.

I believe a majority-minority student population should not have an overwhelmingly White administrative and teaching staff. I am also convinced that Somerville's central office team would benefit from a wider range of professional backgrounds and perspectives. I was surprised when people were puzzled to hear that I had never worked in a central office before and wasn't sure whether I wanted to continue doing so after residency. This parochialism surely limits the kind of diverse talent and potential change that a district might hope to accomplish. Knowing that I had to convince some skeptics of my value was helpful pressure for me to show that I could productively contribute to the district.

In addition to feeling like a professional outsider, my lens in the work was often as a parent and new resident of Somerville. Our children are preschool-age and have not yet experienced the SPS school system, but anticipating that they will someday made me

particularly attuned to the parent and guardian perspective. Oftentimes, I felt we didn't do enough to consider this perspective, for example in communications laden with acronyms and educational jargon. I think the district staff would greatly benefit from some training on parent/guardian empathy and perspective taking. Our under-resourced parent liaisons, who squeeze more than a full week's work into their 19-hour-per-week stipend positions, are an obvious place to invest to help make these connections. This has the potential for two benefits: dispelling myths and assumptions about certain parent groups and widening parents' perspective beyond the experience of their child alone. We often think about education as a mechanism for producing capable and engaged students, but our interactions with parents and guardians have the potential to be equally beneficial for our community at large.

In general, I think more investment in health and human services is warranted. The SPS budget is currently 24 times larger than the HHS department budget. There are also some efficiencies to be gained by combining some programs and discontinuing others. As is often the case in education, our district has frequently been additive, rather than reformative, with regard to programming and student supports. For instance, we have three different race and equity consultants working across the central office, a school site, and the School Committee. Our pre-K, K-8, and high school curriculum planning are all done separately and by different individuals who rarely work together. And, as I have argued, we should revisit existing programs like Community Schools to see how they might be restructured to serve a more representative student population in

the context of other afterschool programs. My hope is that the Community Cabinet can be a more neutral forum to raise and debate these difficult organizational decisions.

As we bring our work forward, I think we must be aware that government-sponsored community planning and visioning is inherently difficult. City governments like Somerville need to both decide on the appropriate format for the participation processes and provide the necessary background information to citizens in order to guarantee a data-driven and purposeful discussion. This means sharing existing knowledge and data on specific issues with citizens and investing in research on issues where knowledge and data is not yet available. Without this, citizens risk misunderstanding or failing to approach issues and problems holistically. Local governments have to finely balance steering the participation processes while making sure not to influence their outcomes.

If the visioning process is not conducted inclusively and carefully, the Somerville Community Cabinet runs a significant risk of jeopardizing the legitimacy of the results and undermining the purpose of civic participation. This is an area in which city officials, having led the original SomerVision process, have more experience than school district leaders. We must be willing to ask for and learn from their knowledge in this area.

I made the case in this paper for the promise of collective impact at the local level. But it's also important to recognize that city government is a relatively weak player in a larger system of power. Metropolitan policies, as Douglas Rae has observed, "turn on chains of decisions made outside the confines of City Hall" (Rae, 2013). Rising housing prices and population displacement dominate Somerville, as in much of Greater Boston,

and city officials have few mechanisms to address these issues. These issues will radically affect the school district over the next decade or more, and yet they are largely the product of economic and policy trends occurring at the state and national levels. As the collective impact work continues in Somerville, more intentional thought should be placed on how we can develop not only community-level leadership but also relationships with leaders in nearby cities and on the state level.

Implications for Sector

Families experience challenges horizontally but government tends to organize vertically. Issues like education, economic security, housing, and health are not fragmented in peoples' lives, but the systems that serve them often are. Even within a medium-sized city government like Somerville's, collaboration is not the natural state. Silos allow leaders to focus on what they can do and block out what may be perceived as beyond their control. This can also occur because of and reinforce a closed network of leaders who are not representative of the people they seek to serve. This has certainly been a challenge that Somerville's Community Cabinet has faced.

Similar to the design thinking method, we must recognize and empathize with the ways students and residents experience our schools and community. If a student needs access to an inhaler at school, she also needs access to that inhaler in her afterschool program. If the housing authority is threatening a student's family with eviction, he brings that trauma and stress to school and his teachers and counselors need to know about it. By taking an empathic approach, we can begin to see how systems need to be reformed to better accommodate our citizens. While this may sound obvious, it is in no

way easy. Breaking siloes and collaborating effectively require trust, and there must be an intentional effort to build it by getting members to understand their own and each other's motivations, interests, and concerns. Without more comprehensive efforts, city and nonprofit reforms will have isolated impact that can rarely be sustained or spread.

Framing opportunity and inclusive prosperity. The rhetorical power of opportunity is attractive and inclusive, and improving equality of opportunity will help us better realize America's values and ideals. Public school districts have not always encouraged and welcomed community support, but instead have defensively left themselves solely responsible for achieving student outcomes and economic mobility. Given U.S. students spend barely 20% of their waking hours in school, this is an impossible task. Inequities in access to basic services, learning opportunities, social capital, and ultimately income are fundamental to child achievement and well-being; schools must partner with their communities to overcome these inequities.

Framing all districts' educational missions as part of an inclusive opportunity agenda invites community and parent engagement. A collective impact approach allows governments and community agencies to think more expansively about the problems their residents are facing. It will allow schools to bring parents and business leaders into their mission, opening up their perspective and the potential for greater investment. Harvard Business School Professor Howard Stevenson has defined entrepreneurship as "pursuit of opportunity beyond the resources you currently control" (Stevenson, 2006). The vision and challenge of an opportunity agenda can move a community like

Somerville to contribute more to the universal education of children. This invites resources that we can get but do not yet have to support all students.

Cities like Somerville are grappling with some of the most difficult challenges facing our society: social mobility, global competition, climate change, and economic inequality. Because, not in spite of, these challenges, cities generally have a problem-solving philosophy backed increasingly by a growing human capital capacity.

Collective impact and networked governance are really just other forms of participatory democracy. This networked approach mirrors the complexity and interdependence of the challenges we face. Traditionally, government responses have tended to be specialized and compartmentalized, but networked efforts like the Community Cabinet are examining challenges in more complex and varied ways.

Working at different levels and expecting resistance. Diverse perspectives and regular reflection are critical to success in improving school districts. My experiences of having taught in an urban district, started and led a nonprofit, being a parent, facilitating the Community Cabinet, and working within a central office have all informed a greater understanding of the complexity of pre-K-12 public education. Being a bus monitor and observing dismissals at different schools was just as helpful as studying our transportation contracts and bus routes to understand their shortcomings. In working together to serve the students in any district, people should embrace a range of experiences and perspectives as organizationally beneficial at every level. This requires being mindful not to put people into categories by role, department, or background.

Finally, on the really difficult days, it's important to remember the city and school district are making progress. As Cohen, Peurach, Glazer, Gates, and Golden (2013) have written, "successes beget challenges" (p. 173). This is the paradoxical result that can occur in any organization but particularly in urban school districts: the better the system addresses one set of weaknesses and problems, the more difficult the task of improvement can become. Because of this, districts that want to continue to improve in their ability to serve every child must place a special emphasis on reflection and organization learning.

Conclusion

In cities across the country, working and middle-class Americans and many in new immigrant communities are struggling to keep their homes, pay their rent, and ensure a better education for their kids. Somerville, Massachusetts is a community in flux, facing many of these national issues on an acute scale. For over a century, Somerville was a working-class neighborhood in the shadow of the better known Cambridge. The city is still populated with a dense mix of blue-collar workers and recent immigrants, all living together in a range of multi-family houses and condos. Today, Somerville is adjusting to the aftershocks of a boom in biotech and a prospering knowledge economy rippling out from Greater Boston. That expansion of wealth and demand is pushing premium jobs and rocketing rents into Somerville, and radically affecting the current and future needs of parents and students in the city's public schools. Somerville's ability to embrace change and celebrate diversity should be a source of pride, but only effective leadership and deliberate social integration can ensure that diversity does not devolve into a source of division.

At a time when our national political system is paralyzed, cities and metropolitan areas like Somerville offer the most promising laboratories for progressive change and social progress. Having embraced the importance of whole child education, Somerville is now using collective impact to strengthen student access to services and opportunities. This effort has the potential to redefine and extend the ideals of participatory democracy at the municipal level. Whether this effort is ultimately sustained will depend in part on

the success of SomerVision for Learning to create a campaign with genuine political access and equality at the center.

Somerville city leaders have taken the first steps by recognizing that educating students is not the responsibility of schools alone. They have also committed to better equalizing starting conditions across lines of racial and ethnic difference by bolstering early childhood education and improving coordination of out of school time providers. The collective impact model of the Community Cabinet has shown promise as an effective means of delivering networked governance and improving OST options. Expanding opportunity in afterschool and summer programs is begetting more political attention because these programs help most parents and students, but yet there has been little systemic focus on them prior to my residency. The model also leverages the strengths of a community to solve its own unique challenges.

An integrated opportunity system for OST programs will provide parents the information they need to understand and access high-quality programming for their students. High-quality OST programs, like Citizen Schools and Breakthrough, provide a structured, safe, and engaging learning context, often allowing youth to make independent choices about how and with whom to spend their time. These programs help students to forge positive relationships with adults and peers, and build social, cognitive, and practical skills. These relationships are often the foundation of social-emotional skills necessary to thrive in life.

During my residency, significant progress has been made with the doubling of afterschool coverage in pre-K and the creation of 140 free, high-quality programming

slots for underserved middle grade students. The Somerville Community Cabinet and the OST Taskforce have created the forums for cross-sector leadership on this issue. The upcoming launch of the SomerVision for Learning campaign recognizes a need to facilitate community conversations across knowledge and hierarchical boundaries in order to develop a sustainable and equitable OST system for all students. And the creation of the Somerville Education Foundation by concerned parents, community members, and school leaders offers a mechanism for supporting and holding accountable this project.

Yet, as ever, Somerville has much work to be done. Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch are still enrolled at half the level of other students in the district's major afterschool offerings. Key staff seemed unconcerned as to the urgency of addressing this issue, or examining other areas that are working "well enough." Despite two years of progress with the *By All Means* Community Cabinet, and clear support throughout from the mayor and superintendent, artificial political boundaries between city and school services and staff remain.

Raising these concerns and envisioning what might be a more effective system is one thing; sustained progress at scale is something else. Effecting sustainable change requires a context-appropriate balance of pressure and support—pressure to engender action and support to increase its effectiveness. Often, public and political support for the status quo is based on rooted beliefs about meritocracy and perceived or real resource scarcity. Behind these beliefs sits a power structure that preserves advantages for wealthier and more privileged groups at the expense of the less privileged. To create and

sustain meaningful policies and practices to equalize opportunities for low-income students and students of color requires more than technical solutions and more than committed city leaders. It also requires public constituency and civic mobilization. In this, Somerville offers much hope.

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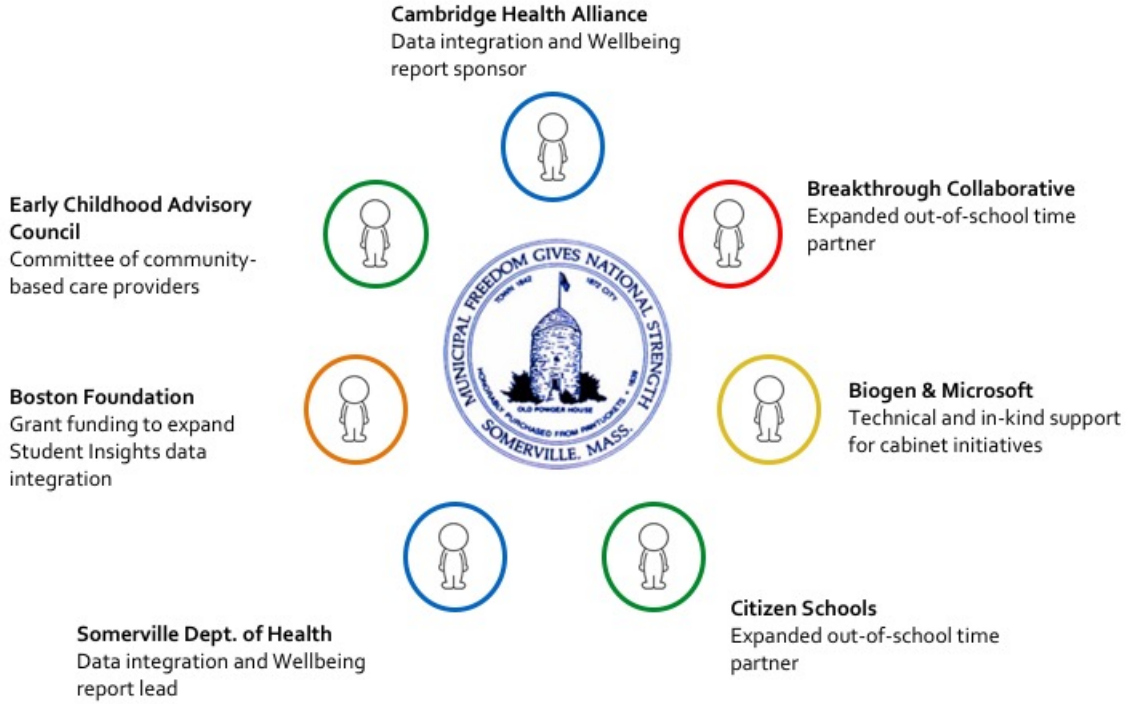
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Appendices

Appendix A. Somerville Community Cabinet Early Stakeholders and Partners, 2017

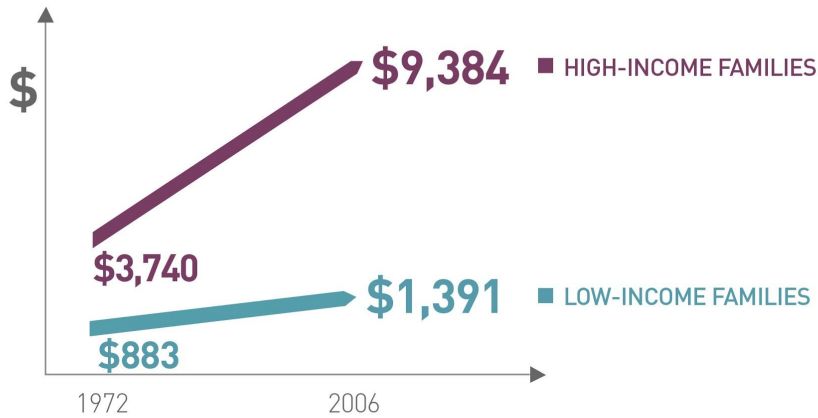
SOMERVILLE CABINET PARTNERS



THE ENRICHMENT GAP

The gap in spending on child enrichment activities between high- and low-income families has nearly tripled since 1972.

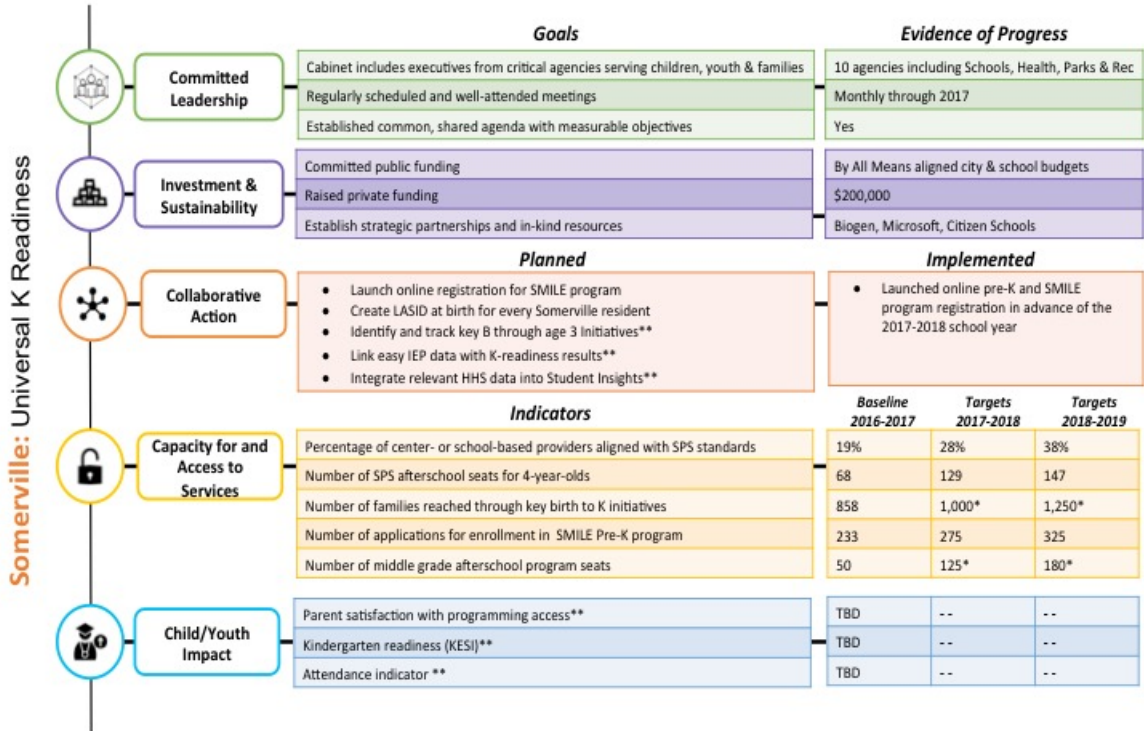
CHANGE IN ANNUAL SPENDING ON CHILD ENRICHMENT



Source: Greg Duncan and Richard Murnane, "Restoring Opportunity: The Crisis of Inequality and the Challenge for American Education." (Harvard Education Press / Russell Sage Foundation, 2014)

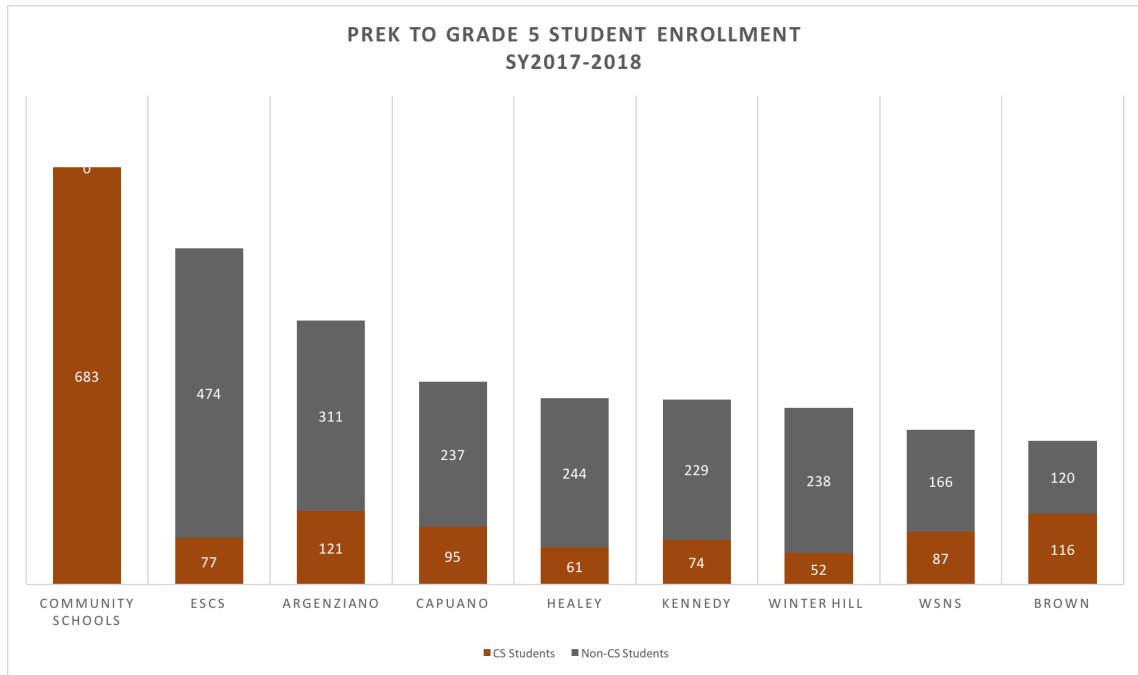
Source: Duncan and Murnane, 2014

Appendix C. Somerville By All Means Cabinet Measures



Source: developed by the author

Appendix D. Somerville Community Schools Enrollment 2017-2018

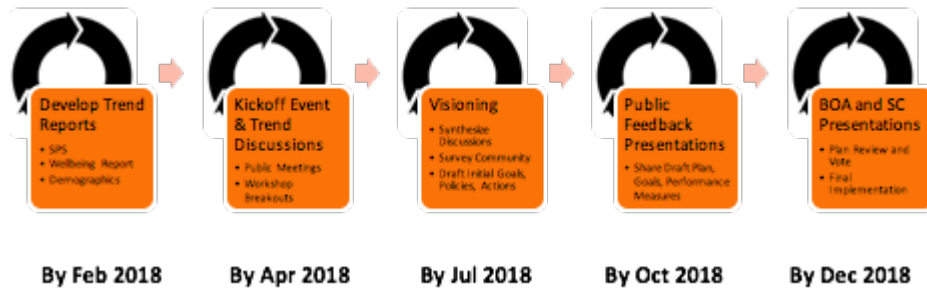


Source: developed by the author

Note. The Benjamin Brown School, where nearly 50% of students are in this afterschool program, is one of the district’s highest income and least diverse schools. East Somerville Community School (ESCS), where 14% of students are in afterschool, is one of the district’s most diverse and lowest income schools.

Appendix E. SomerVision for Learning Process and Timeline

1. **Learning Trend Reports.** Support SPS staff, city, and nonprofit partners in producing a series of research reports, such as the Wellbeing Report of Somerville. These reports would detail where the city is in terms of key indicators that affect and/or gauge learning. This series might include such topics as city demographics, cost of living, health and wellness, and learning pathways. The trend reports, and the public dialogue around them, would serve as a common foundation for the eventual SVL plan.
2. **Community Values Workshops.** Facilitate 3-4 public meetings where the trend reports and future of Somerville learning can be discussed in detail. The workshops will use dynamic approaches to public participation, such as small group breakouts, multilingual interpretation, and real-time graphic recording of ideas.
3. **SVL Goal Sharing Series.** Facilitate 3-4 public meetings to review the draft goals of the SVL. These will be interactive events that solicit community feedback using multilingual interpretation services, conducted in different neighborhoods across the city to maximize broad public participation.
4. **Public Survey on SVL Goals.** Distribute a multilingual online and print survey to cast an even wider net for public input on the draft SVL goals. Outreach will leverage community partnerships and internal resources like the Somerville Family Learning Collaborative (SFLC) to reach as many residents as possible.
5. **Public Feedback Presentations.** Status updates on the SVL plan will be presented at ResiStat, School Committee, and other neighborhood meetings during this time. Members of the Steering Committee will give updates to individual sponsors and community organizations as needed.
6. **Final Report and Presentation to School Committee, Board of Aldermen.** Regular updates and a draft plan will be presented to the School Committee and the Board of Aldermen for feedback and eventual adoption.



Source: developed by the author