

Somerville School Construction Advisory Group

Meeting Summary- June 17, 2025

On Tuesday, June 17, 2025, the Somerville School Construction Advisory Group convened its eighth meeting on Zoom to discuss educational considerations for their recommendation and finalize the broad public survey.

Links to summaries, presentations, and recordings from these meetings can be found here: <https://www.somervillema.gov/cag>. Below are action items, followed by a summary of discussions. A list of Advisory Group attendance is attached at the end of this document.

Action Items

CBI	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Draft a June meeting summary
City of Somerville	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compile relevant data and meeting materials for the July Advisory Group meeting• Conduct a plain language review of the draft survey
DREAM Collaborative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Incorporate feedback from the Advisory Group to finalize the survey• Conduct a plain language review of the draft survey• Share updated survey draft with the Advisory Group
Advisory Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the June meeting summary and the final survey draft

Summary of discussions

Welcome

Stacie Smith welcomed the Advisory Group and noted that, due to Rich's last minute absence, the discussion of Brown School options would be postponed to a future meeting.

CAG Debrief of School Coffee Hours

In June, Somerville City Staff organized principal's coffee hours at Winter Hill School and Brown School. Denise Taylor, Director of Communications and Community Engagement, highlighted that this would be one of many opportunities for parents to be involved in the process and noted that one outcome for the City was the ability to meet with school family liaisons to strategize the best outreach methods. The Advisory Group's parent representatives shared their key takeaways from the respective events.

The Winter Hill Parent Representative shared the the following takeaways:

- The event had a strong turnout, specifically of parents who are active in the community and informed on the project. Parents named SSEPAC as a core constituency to engage in the process.
- Parents were surprised by the longer building project timeline and higher potential student capacity for the new building.
- Parents expressed interest in a transparent decision making process and a decision regarding the future Winter Hill School building prior to the January deadline.

The Brown School Parent representatives shared the following takeaways:

- Parents appreciated the opportunity to have small conversations with City staff and appreciated clear statements from the City on the timeline.
- Parents generally did not understand the potential need to combine schools and expressed strong interest in maintaining the walkability and scale of the Brown School.
- Parents wanted an outcome that meets the priorities of both school communities and a process that encourages unity among the school communities rather than conflict.
- Parents were under the impression that ADA compliance and repairs to the facility would not be costly.

Educational Considerations

Ruben Carmona, Superintendent of Somerville Public Schools, introduced the educational considerations presentation and emphasized that no single factor should be decisive for the group's recommendation, encouraging the group to view the data as evidence-based information that will support their recommendations. Amara Anosike, Chief of Staff for Somerville Public Schools, presented research on educational outcomes related to specialized programming, school size, distance to school, and facility features (specifically gathering spaces). The research findings suggest that outcomes peak for mid-sized K-8 schools of approximately 400 to 700 students, which can balance benefits like specialized services and fiscal efficiency with individualized attention. Beyond school size considerations, increasing student diversity through specialized programming may provide slight benefits to learners when adequately supported. The impact of increased distance from school on student outcomes is generally minor, but it can affect students' sense of belonging and family engagement. Additionally, actively used large gathering spaces such as gyms and auditoriums can boost academics, behavior, and engagement when they are well-programmed and maintained. The entire presentation, including citations for the research, is available [here](#).

Members' comments and questions are summarized below, with responses from the City and CBI italicized.

- The presentation noted positive outcomes for schools with enrollments of 400-700 students. That's a fairly broad range—is there any indication of how firm that cutoff is?
Ms. Anosike: The researcher explained that school size is not a determining factor on student outcomes. You could have a great school at either end of that range. There are other factors that influence student outcomes.
Supt. Carmona: We have schools ranging in size in Somerville. The Argeniziano has around 600 students and it is understood to be a well run school. Schools with 800-900

students can require additional staff support. A school with 800 students can have its drawbacks but I often find that the issue that defines the future of the school is the leadership at the school and the culture they build.

- Did the researcher visit Somerville schools as a part of their research to look at how the spaces were used?

Ms. Anosike: We engaged him to do a thorough review of the research rather than visit the schools.

Supt. Carmona: We have done an assessment of how the spaces are used in the district. We shared the information about space limitations with the MSBA. That study, in part, informed the maximum enrollment we were granted by the MSBA.

- Having dedicated providers was cited as one of the key benefits of larger schools in your presentation. Can you explain why East Somerville Community School, despite being the largest school, shares providers with other schools?

Supt. Carmona: There are positions that are shared between buildings. Some schools with larger needs do not share providers. It depends on the district's resources and the needs of the school. In smaller schools you may not be able to have a full concentration of teachers due to the number of students.

- How are "outcomes" defined in the presentation?

Ms. Anosike: Some slides are referencing academic outcomes such as grades and test scores, others are speaking to behavioral wellness, and some reference family engagement.

- How has the relocation of Winter Hill School students to the Edgerly impacted student outcomes?

Supt. Carmona: We have seen an impact on how the community congregates around the school, but there has been very little impact on attendance or performance.

- What is the school district's thinking around adding additional swing space in the district?

Supt. Carmona: All of our schools' facilities are at capacity and our programs are growing. We need additional spaces for interventions, afterschool programming, classrooms etc. The school capacity offered by the MSBA is in part a response to the needs and gaps in our district's facilities.

- One Advisory Group member noted that the study's findings felt representative of her experience as a parent of a student at the East Somerville Community School. The member reinforced that some students travel a far distance to attend the school and this does not affect attendance and noted the benefits of a large school with separate spaces for different activities.

- Is there a long-term plan for the size and model of Somerville Public Schools that the Advisory Group should consider in its recommendation?

Supt. Carmona: My role is to advocate for what families ask for. I can speak to some challenges with our current configurations but I have not been directed to address a long range plan determining one model or another. This decision rests with the community and their priorities.

Andre Green: The data indicates there is no right answer on how to structure the schools. So far the School Committee has been working with the spaces it has. One challenge is that it is hard to program one K-5 school in a K-8 district. A long term plan might not be the most effective strategy because of the number of factors to consider.

Community Engagement Process

The Advisory Group reviewed and provided feedback on a draft community survey developed by the DREAM Collaborative in partnership with City staff and four Advisory Group members. Members' discussion and decisions on the survey are summarized based on topic below:

- Survey Development Process: Members appreciated the collaborative approach to creating the survey and the opportunity to provide input on the draft.
- Background Information: The group discussed optimal placement of project background information. Members emphasized the importance of brevity and plain language to encourage participation. The DREAM Collaborative suggested optional "read more" dropdowns before each question and members generally supported this approach.
- Accessibility: Members emphasized the need for a plain language review to ensure the survey is accessible and translatable. The DREAM Collaborative will work with the City to conduct this plain language review and will collaborate with the Advisory Group to ensure that any revised questions maintain the same framing and meaning as the original draft.
- Survey Question 2: The Advisory Group agreed to remove the response option about building a school at Trum Field contingent on relocating the field to the original Winter Hill School site or another central location.
- Survey Question 5: Members debated including this question, with some concerned that response options lacked nuance and might confuse respondents or influence other answers. Others felt it could provide valuable insights into non-parents' priorities and willingness to support a debt override vote. The group agreed to reposition the question away from school-related questions and remove school-related response options.

Public Comment

Aili Contini Field spoke during public comment and highlighted that parents that attended the coffee hour at the Winter Hill School hoped for a decision from the Mayor quickly following the CAG's final recommendation and expressed confusion with the January decision deadline.

Closing Remarks

Ms. Smith provided an overview of the presentations for the July 17th Advisory Group meeting and that despite initially planning to take August off the group would likely meet to discuss the data it had received so far.

Somerville School Construction Advisory Group Members	
	Ryan Williams
Brown School Parent Representatives	Marta Guerra Pastroán
Brown School Teacher Representative	Julia Austein
	Matthew Roberts
Somerville School Parent Representatives	Emily Miyares
Business Community Representative	Jack Connolly
Winter Hill Parent Representative	Matthew Daniels
	Gandhy Aldana
Community Groups: Padres Latinos	Paula Edith
Green New Deal for Somerville Schools	Corey Donahue
Somerville Public Schools Representative	Amara Anosike
Somerville School Committee Representative	Andre Green
Somerville City Council Representative	Kristen Strezo

Planning Team, City Staff and Consultants	
Facilitation Team: Consensus Building Institute	Stacie Smith
	Meira Downie
	Magda Gomez
	Ralph Henry
	Nick Alakel
	Nikki Spencer
	Ruben Carmona
	Khin That Mar
	Danielle Lynch-Barry
City of Somerville	Denise Taylor
Community Engagement Consultants: DREAM Collaborative	Rosa Herrero
	Diana Marsh