



Somerville Public Schools

Education • Inspiration • Excellence

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To: Somerville Public Schools School Committee

From: Dr. Jessica Boston Davis, Assistant Superintendent of Academics

Cc: Dr. Ruben Carmona, Superintendent

Date: September 8, 2025

Subject: Quarterly Academic Update: Beginning of the School Year Updates

Purpose:

The purpose of this memo is to provide an overview of academics in SPS as we begin the 2025 - 2026 school year. This is in alignment with the SPS Strategic Plan Priority #1: Academic Excellence. All curriculum work is done in partnership and constant collaboration with our Multilingual Learner Education and Special Education Departments.

Background:

Over the past three years, SPS has focused on creating a coherent system to advance high-quality and research based curriculum, instruction, and assessment. We have invested heavily in high quality instructional materials, assessment systems, collaborative planning time, and coaching. This memo will provide an overview of academics for the 2025 - 2026 school year.

Grants:

We are thrilled to have been awarded three grants to support the advancement of academic excellence in SPS. The grants are listed below:

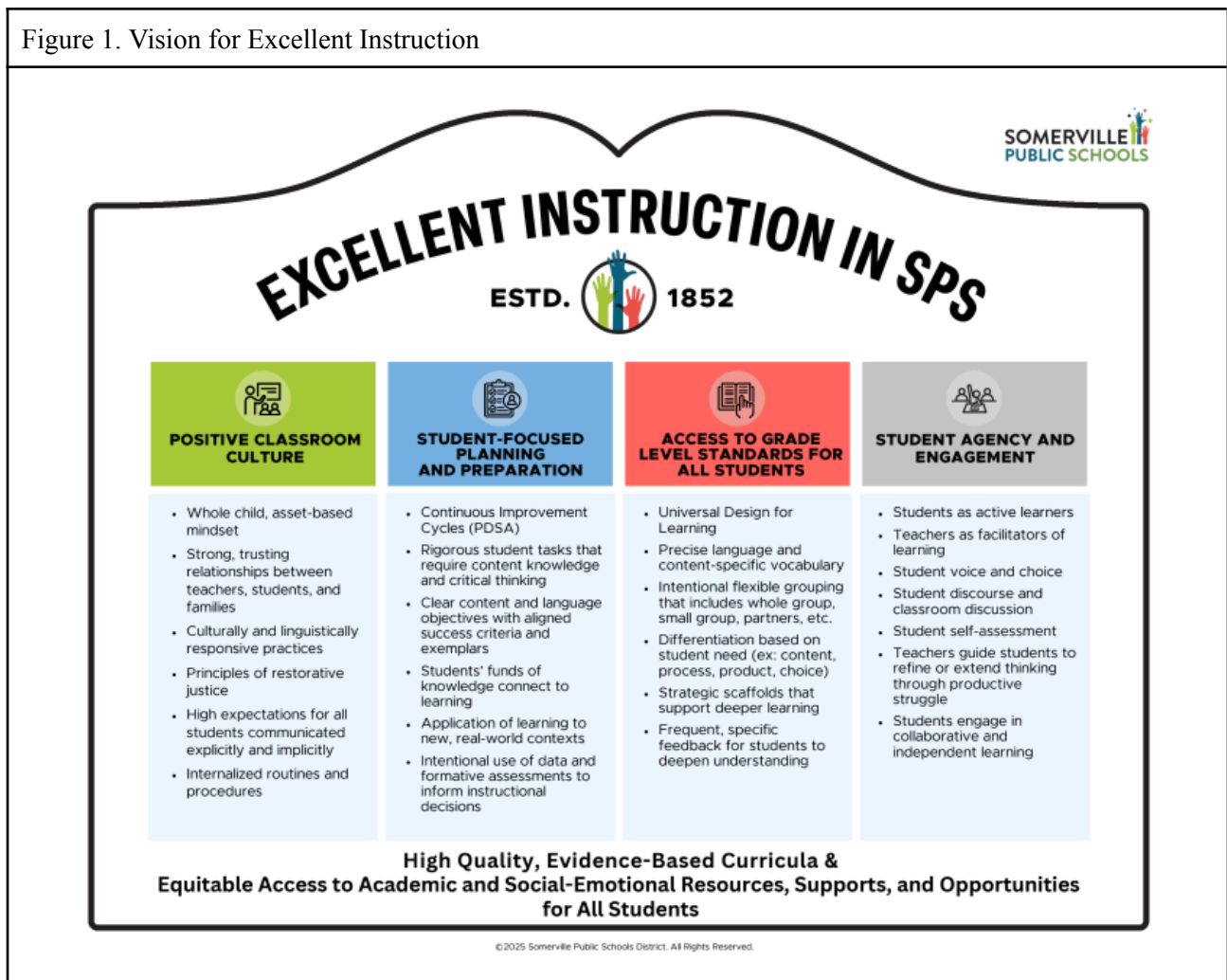
- **PRISM grant:** We were awarded the Partnership for Reading Success Massachusetts (PRISM) grant for **\$338,000** to support our Wit and Wisdom and Fishtank implementation. This will cover part of the materials cost, as well as stipends for teachers to attend professional development and to serve on the K-8 Literacy Leadership Team. The grant will also partially fund our partnership with TNTP to support the rollout of these two curricula. This is a one time grant.
- **Nellie Mae - Navigating Now: District Responsive Support:** We were awarded a grant for **\$100,000** from the NMEF which we will use to support our College and Career Readiness Department. We will use the funding to fund the college advising corps model (which experienced a significant decrease in programming due to federal funding cuts), increasing support for first gen college students and their families, and expanding programming to the middle schools in the form of career fairs, college tours, and events. This is a one year grant.
- **Barr Foundation - Strengthening School Leadership:** We have formally been invited to apply and are awaiting final confirmation for a **\$200,000** grant to support our already existing work on strengthening the capacity of current and aspirational school leaders (including principals, assistant principals, and other academic-focused staff) to serve as effective and impactful instructional leaders. This is a two year grant.



Vision of Excellent Instruction:

During the 2024–2025 school year, we brought together all academic administrators (including principals, assistant principals, department chairs, curriculum and data coordinators, and leaders from the Special Education and MLE departments) to develop a Vision of Excellent Instruction for Somerville Public Schools (see Figure 1). We then shared drafts of the Vision with all educators during two district-wide professional development sessions and revised it based on their feedback. The result is a strong, shared vision that will serve as a roadmap for the year, promoting cohesion and alignment across all instructional initiatives. This includes professional development, instructional rounds, coaching, and common planning time.

Figure 1. Vision for Excellent Instruction



Curriculum Rollout Updates:

SPS began implementing a robust PK–8 curriculum rollout plan in the 2023–2024 school year. Since then, teams of educators and administrators have collaborated on successful curriculum launches, which have included extensive professional development, unit previews throughout the year, targeted coaching, and the development and procurement of new materials. This memo focuses specifically on the K–8 subjects undergoing curricular changes.

Figure 2. Curriculum Rollout Timeline

Grade Levels	School Year 2024-2025	School Year 2025-2026	School Year 2026-2027
Kindergarten - Grade 2	ELA: No Curricular Changes	ELA: Using SPS curriculum, FUNdations pilot at East Somerville K and 1. Preparing to launch Wit and Wisdom and FUNdations.	ELA: Year 1 of Full Implementation Wit & Wisdom, Continued use of FunDations
	Math: Early Adopters of IM	Math: Year 1 of Full Implementation of IM	Math: Continued Use & Monitor IM
Grade 3 - Grade 5	ELA: Curriculum Selection Committee	ELA: Year 1 of Full Implementation of Wit & Wisdom (Gr. 3 -4) and Fishtank (Gr. 5), Grade 3 FUNdations	ELA: Continued Use & Monitor Wit & Wisdom (Gr. 3 -4) and Fishtank (Gr. 5)
	Math: Year 1 of Full Implementation of IM	Math: Continued Use & Monitor IM	Math: Continued Use & Monitor IM
Grade 6 - Grade 8	ELA: Year 1 of Full Implementation of Fishtank	ELA: Continued Use & Monitor Fishtank	ELA: Continued Use & Monitor Fishtank
	Math: Continued Use & Monitor IM	Math: <i>Update to newest version of IM.</i> Continued Use & Monitor	Math: Continued Use & Monitor IM
	Science: Curriculum Selection Committee	Science: Curriculum Pilot of two programs DLCS Pilot at East and AFA	Science: Year 1 of Implementation of selected curriculum
Curriculum Selection in Progress		Year 1 of Implementation	Study & Monitor Implementation

Data-Driven Decision Making:

We started this year with a renewed focus on data-driven decision making in every department. All administrators participated in a two-day planning session focused on building the SPS Culture of Data during our Kick-Off meetings. We also trained all administrators and educators on how to use our new data platform, Open Architects, prior to the start of the school year. Open Architects is a secure portal of data dashboards that allows us to view student data, such as assessments, attendance, enrollment, interventions, etc, at the district, school, classroom, and individual levels.

In that light, we want to focus on two data points from last year that will guide our work. One area of celebration and one area that we need to work on as a district.

- **Celebration:** Chronic absenteeism decreased compared to the previous year and we saw positive median growth on i-Ready math and reading.
- **Growth:** While we are seeing signs of improvements in growth measures on multiple assessments such as MCAS and i-Ready, it does not yet reflect the high standards that we know our students are capable of.
 - o Part of building our culture of data as a district is working in teams across schools and departments to understand the key drivers behind these persistent disparities and strategically plan interventions and allocate resources to address these challenges.

These and other data points will be discussed in greater detail at our October 6 meeting.

MTSS Updates:

- **MTSS Specialist:** This year, we are excited to introduce a new district-wide role: the MTSS Specialist. This specialist helps schools develop effective, data-driven systems that support students academically, behaviorally, socially, and emotionally through tiered interventions. They will collaborate with educators and leaders to ensure a consistent, systematic approach across the district, aligning MTSS efforts with special education and related services. Additionally, the specialist works with the Departments of Student Services and Academics to design and maintain data systems that track interventions, monitor progress, and guide decision-making.
- **BCH Partnership:** SPS is continuing our partnership and grant funded work with Boston Children's Hospital to support building a consistent, aligned, and effective MTSS across the district.

Additional Updates:

- **MA Dyslexia Institute:** Last year, a team of educators along with Kathleen Seward participated in the MA Dyslexia Institute which culminated with the creation of a Dyslexia Action Plan for our district. Much of the work of the institute and the plan was establishing clear and consistent tier one instruction and assessment for all students in order to reach the goal of having all students reading fluently by the end of third grade. For more information, the plan is linked on the [academics section of the SPS Website](#) under "Resources."
- Preliminary **MCAS Data** is still embargoed, but we plan to share a full presentation of MCAS and other assessment data in the October 6 meeting. In addition, the Department of Elementary and Secondary school has announced that they will launch an **MCAS Family Portal** that is expected to be available on October 1. The MCAS Family Portal will provide families with online access to a student's individual performance data on the MCAS tests and will enable them to track assessment results from year to year.
- **Competency Determination:** Following the passage of Ballot Question 2, MCAS can no longer be used for Competency Determination (CD) which is the state's high school graduation requirement. Last year, the School Committee passed a *temporary, one year CD* requirement,

while we waited for more guidance from the state. **This year, all districts are required to develop a new local CD policy based on new DESE guidance, and have that policy passed by the School Committee, by December 31, 2025.** We are currently working with SHS, Full Circle, and Central Office leadership to bring recommendations for the local CD to the School Committee. We will share an update in October.