

Madalyn Letellier

From: Darci Hanna [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 20, 2025 10:44 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Fully Fund SPS

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Dear City Council Members,

Please fully fund our schools. My children, as WHCIS students, have seen numerous disruptions to their education already because of chronic underfunding, deferred building maintenance, and lack of foresight by city leadership. They've been shuttled around to the high school, then Tufts, and now Edgerly for classes during WHCIS building closures. Now they'll have to endure Edgerly, which is a poor substitute for a functioning school building, until they get to the high school. The Edgerly bathrooms currently have multiple boarded-up stalls. My eldest's teacher was trapped in an elevator, then later had to be carried out by firefighters and was unable to reach his classroom to teach while the elevator was out of service. The outside recess areas are totally insufficient, among many other issues. And yet, the teachers and staff of WHCIS have shown up every day and tried their best for the students. But the situation is visibly grinding them down. They deserve fully funded schools and more attention and solutions to the problems they're facing daily.

As you are aware, school funding has been at the forefront of public discussion across the city in recent weeks. A clear gap has emerged between what our educators—those who work most closely with our students—have identified as necessary (a 10% increase in funding), and what the mayor has proposed (a 5% increase).

Despite growing public consensus in favor of trusting the judgment of educational professionals, the proposed SPS budget appears to have been constrained by the fiscal parameters set by the mayor's office.

I respectfully urge the City Council to vote to accept the authority granted to you under Chapter 329 of the Acts of 1987 to consider and adopt an alternative, more comprehensive budget. Empower SPS to design a budget that reflects the true needs of our students and educators. Let us see what is possible when our schools are given the opportunity to lead—and commit to directing any available discretionary free cash toward supporting their vision. This change in the school budget procedure would benefit our system long term by strengthening the ability of our whole city government to support schools.

A concerned voter,
Darci Hanna
Ward 4

Madalyn Letellier

From: Christopher Spicer Hankle [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 20, 2025 4:43 PM
To: JT Scott; Public Comments; Naima Sait; Wilfred Mbah; Willie Burnley, Jr.; Jake Wilson; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Attachments: thumbnail_SPS Students WO Disabilities- LITERACY.png; thumbnail_SPS Students wDisabilities- MATH (2).png; Student Wo disabilities math.png; thumbnail_SPS Students wDisabilities- LITERACY (1).png

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Dear City Clerk Kim Wells,
Please add to next available
May 20, 2025
Somerville City Council
Finance Committee meeting

Comment from Somerville Human Rights Commissioner Christopher Spicer, [REDACTED], Ward 5

In this testimony I would like to focus on funding for Somerville Schools—which I will depict as a constellation of vulnerable persons. As a member of the SPS intermittent substitution pool, I feel especially compelled to join our educators call to action and invite your support. In my remarks I address the imperative to fully fund the education of students facing homelessness and children living with disabilities.

To begin, my comments will address the FY 2026 goals

“Ongoing partnerships and collaboration with families and caregivers of special education students in order to improve student’s educational experiences. Expand partnerships with community stakeholders.”

And the SPS budget calling for the 344K or 1.9% increase to meet transportation needs for special education students and others.

As a parent impacted by the Winter Hill School relocation—my family benefits from transportation—making the morning bus as early as 7:05am.

I am a current intermittent substitute for Somerville Public Schools—who has welcomed our special education students to WHCIS. Albeit working only two days—once in the fall and once in the spring—surely brief exposure to AIMS students with Autism, and English Language Learners and 7 and 8th grade social studies students. Yet I know that observation and experience are data points you care about on this committee. I have first hand what exceptional staff we have in the AIMS program and—whatever their share of WHCIS’s 9th percentile MCAS scores—I am sure I have had the delight of meeting some of tomorrow’s leaders!

In the context of Massachusetts, I am proud of the ambition of SPS to serve our diverse student body needs and improve care for our vulnerable populations of students. My eyes were opened by

Superintendent Ruben Carmona and the excellent staff steering the focus group I participated in last year preparing the Strategic Plan—so many of us feel we are on the outside—we want to meaningfully engage—and that’s part of why I took the step of becoming an intermittent substitute. If I could pay for a day of childcare with the wages I made the number of days I could do my part would have increased. Yet I will say that the experience got me in touch with the plight of paraeducators, and schools who make use of them as building subs, for lack of a sufficient pool of ready and willing intermittent subs.

Somerville Winter Hill Innovation School Dean Brendan Buckland. “We are the worst performing school in the district for MCAS scores. Though an imperfect metric, they are the best shorthand we have for this forum to compare the worst performing (9th percentile, WHCIS) with the highest (Brown, 90%). I do not know how the city and the district look at such a situation and call for service level delivery, this is a living example of an equity issue, a crisis calling out for more resources, not fewer. We are often told that collective teacher efficacy is the best lever by which to effect real change in our schools. Ensure that we collect effective teachers and keep them in classrooms like the Winter Hill by increasing the school’s budget and by meeting this moment of crisis with leadership.

“While the MCAS offers a useful data point for understanding overall achievement in literacy, math, science, we believe other assessments, such as i-Ready, DIBELS, and unit tests, provide more meaningful insights for addressing the needs of current students,” Dr. Carmona said. “I welcome families to contact the district with any questions about these assessments and their role in our teaching strategies and professional development.” In its simultaneous release of the 2024 Massachusetts Accountability System, DESE identified three schools in the district as “Requiring Assistance or Intervention.” DESE’s Center for School and District Partnership (CSDP) will work with SPS this school year to implement systems and practices that advance equity and result in positive outcomes and learning experiences for all students. Support from CSDP may include financial resources, professional development, and additional targeted assistance.

We consider the perspective of families and children living with disabilities within Somerville Public Schools, especially through a human rights lens.

I will touch on two aspect of the imperative to fully fund our care to vulnerable students.

One of the most acute stresses of human rights in our city—students facing homelessness—is seen as students cope with the enormous forces driving our housing crisis. Let me report startling numbers shared from the School Committee. Earlier this winter I learned that the school year in our district opened with 111 students facing housing instability. 79 K-8 students became 61 after the Holiday break as 18 moved to shelter or out of state. And among the remaining 49 students in grades 9-12, 19 are unaccompanied minors. Deserved thanks for compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act goes to Regina Bertholdo and Jennifer Ochoa who work directly with our homeless families.

As my colleague Commissioner Best writes: “Some of the key issues involve the identification and delivery of services, the lack of IEPs and delayed evaluations, and the gap between what schools can do and what children truly need. From a human rights perspective, these are not just educational shortcomings—they are violations of a child’s right to equitable access. **When children don’t get the services they need, they are denied their opportunity to reach their full potential. That harm doesn’t stay in childhood—it follows them into adulthood in the form of missed opportunities, discrimination, and struggle.**

“These issues fall directly under the responsibility of the Somerville Human Rights Ordinance (Chapter 2, Article VI), which tasks us with protecting the civil and human rights of all residents. When special education systems fail our children, families are left unsupported, teachers are unprepared, and children’s rights are ignored.”

Relevant laws and protections assembled by my colleague Elyse Best include:

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which affirms the right to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE);
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which guarantees accommodations in federally funded institutions;
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which prohibits disability-based discrimination;
- Massachusetts Special Education Law (M.G.L. c. 71B), which ensures timely evaluations and service delivery;
- And, globally, Article 23 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the dignity and support every child with a disability deserves.

And I want to underscore, too—As Commissioner Best writes: “Immigrant families often express how grateful they are that their children receive any education at all. But the education their children are receiving still doesn’t meet their specific needs. That is an important truth to hold. Awareness of that gap could be a powerful tool in helping us build better systems that truly support every child, no matter their background.”

Considering what I know of all of you on the committee--I'm sure you've seen the slides that I'm attaching and that I'm not telling you anything you don't already agree with and that's a comfort to be in such good hands. The efforts of this finance committee to secure the increase of 1.9% in this year's city budget is very appreciated.

Finally, to end on a personal note: My daughter is a Wildcat, my wife Emily Hankle serves on the PTA as co-vice president, and yes, I’m very well aware of the building committee frustration. But infrastructure is half the battle.

My Trull Street neighbor, a SPS Dean of Students, lost bids on several Trull Street properties they attempted to buy, as owners dismissed heartfelt letters of serving our vulnerable community. Attracting quality educators with meaningful work and a devoted caring community is not the problem. But retaining them at sufficient salary levels is vital if we are to triage performance levels.

Thank you for your attention,
Sincerely
Christopher Ryan Spicer
Somerville Human Rights Co-Commissioner

"Strategic Plan vs. Harsh Reality: SPS Funding Shortchanges Students and Staff"
<https://www.thesomervilletimes.com/archives/140189>

"Ed Department Report Finds Massachusetts Fails to Support Students with Special Education Needs"

<https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2025/2/19/doe-dese-report-education/>



Mathematics

Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) tells us how much a student has grown compared to students across the state that have performed similarly on past MCAS exams.

State Comparison: Average Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) in Math



 [View on Tableau Public](#)



District Strategic Plan Outcomes Dashboard

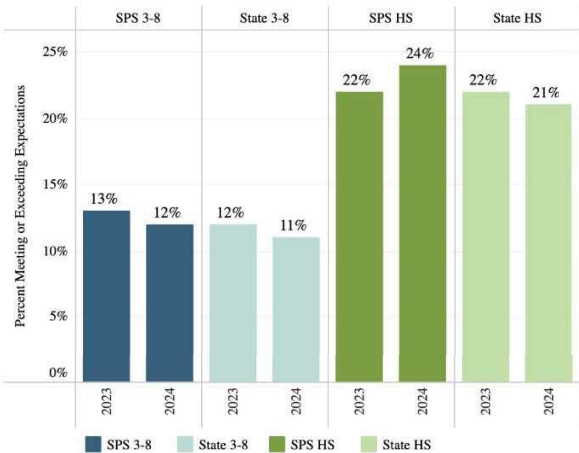
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Literacy

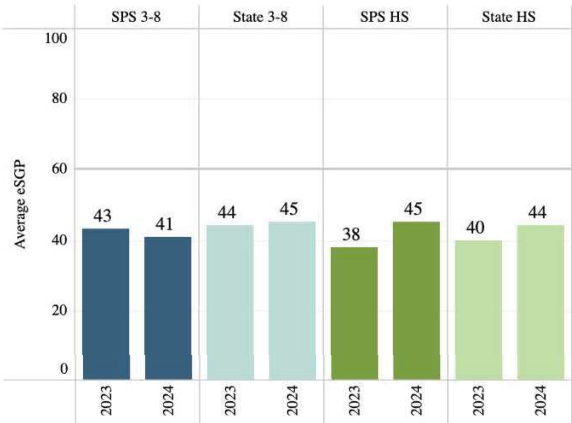
The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, or MCAS, helps educators, families, and students understand how they are mastering their grade level content.

Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) tells us how much a student has grown compared to students across the state that have performed similarly on past MCAS exams.

State Comparison: Percent Meeting or Exceeding Expectations in ELA



State Comparison: Average Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) in ELA



Select the buttons to the right to filter to specific groups of students. --->

Subgroup

☐ Multi-race

☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

☒ Students with Disabilities

☐ White

[View on Tableau Public](#)

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District Strategic Plan Outcomes Dashboard

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Mathematics

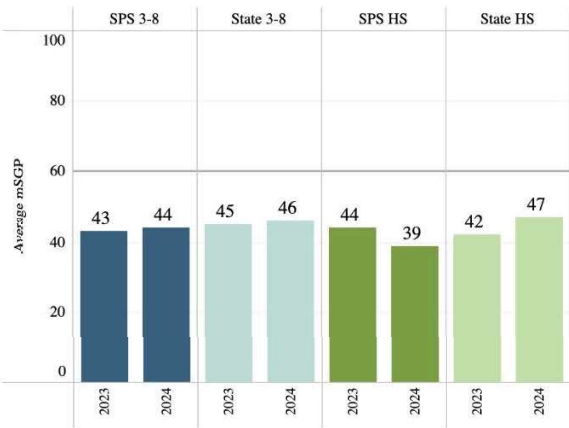
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State Comparison: Average Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) in Math



Subgroup

- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☒ Students with Disabilities
- ☐ White

Select the buttons to the right to filter to specific groups of students. --->



District Strategic Plan Outcomes Dashboard

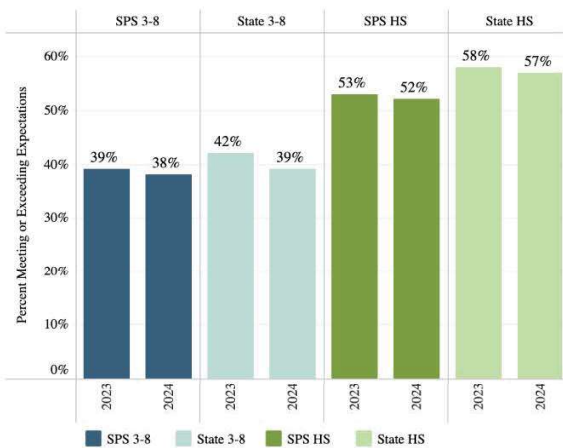
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Literacy

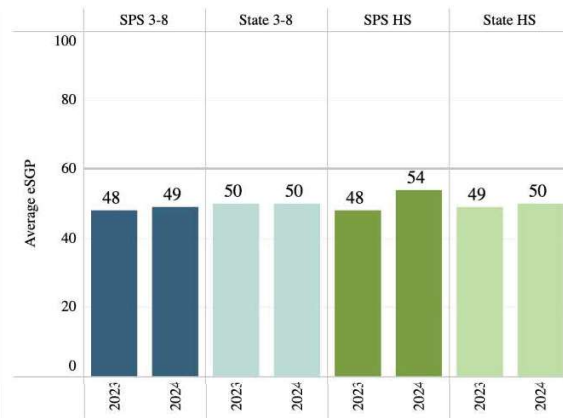
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State Comparison: Average Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) in ELA



Select the buttons to the right to filter to specific groups of students. --->

Subgroup

- ☒ All Students
- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black

 View on Tableau Public

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