

Dear Mayor Ballantyne, School Committee Chair Green, City Council President Ewen-Campen and Superintendent Curley:

On behalf of the WHCIS PTA and the Healey PTA, I am writing to schedule a meeting with Mayor Ballantyne and Chair Green, to discuss the recent letter from the WHCIS Student Council, addressed to Mayor Ballantyne and SPD Chief Feminino. At the request of WHCIS students, who wish to remain anonymous, the WHCIS PTA spearheaded the endorsement of their letter by parents and teachers, as well as some selected students. We were able to obtain over 115 signatures. (See attached.) The letter, with ink signatures as preferred by Student Council, was mailed out to you a few days ago.

The Student Council has developed ideas that they believe would help assuage their fears and reduce the incidents of violence. With the summer months coming soon, some of these ideas are ripe for discussion now rather than later. While the PTAs recognize that a sustainable and permanent resolution to their concerns would only be possible with the engagement of regional actors and stakeholders, our PTAs have worked to identify key action items that have the potential to be realized in a short timeline, and maximize the available resources.

- 1) **We ask the City and SPS to give the highest priority for SHA families in Summer Youth Jobs, and all summer programs (whether academic, enrichment and recreational) funded by the City and SPS.** In particular, we would like to prioritize free and low-cost programs that are easily accessible, OR, offer transportation. Including specifically, the Mayor's summer jobs program, Summer School, SPELL, Community Schools, Somertime Day Program, and other Parks and Rec programs, Becoming A Man (BAM) and the Mystic Learning Center.

Our PTAs are prepared to help publicize opportunities, and our school liaisons are prepared to help parents with the application process. In fact, we have already started this work! We have organized, in partnership with Padres Latinos and East Somerville PTA, a virtual summer program fair for Somerville families on March 16th and 17th – and will be offered in four different languages with SPS support. More than 18 different summer programs will be represented, and many of them offer scholarships, discounts and sliding scale fees. Or, accept State vouchers.

- 2) **We request that the City and the SPS work closely with the SHA and with community partners to publicize opportunities, ON-SITE, at the Mystics, and emphasize clearly that we will offer residents priority enrollment.** This would only be a short-term project, but ideally, one where residents get to sit with someone to help them compile the information and documents they need to successfully complete applications. PTA volunteers are prepared to offer staff and administrative support on any of this, if that is needed, and appropriate (i.e., does not violate safety concerns, or the privacy and confidentiality of residents).

We have also provided parents with copies of the SomerPromise and Parks and Rec summer directories. We will be messaging and furiously promoting all summer programs in the next few weeks.

- 3) **Teen job opportunities, in particular, would be of importance to SHA residents. Could the SHA send out applications for summer jobs with their next monthly rent statement?** Could we have the two summer program directories available to Mystics residents at the Mystic Learning Center, the SHA management office(s), the SPS Youth Empowerment Center, etc.?

- 4) **We want to note here that Student Council has expressed their desire for students experiencing homelessness to be included in receiving highest priority for summer program enrollment and summer jobs.** Although we know that the McKinney-Vento protections are already at play, to the extent that they do not explicitly and adequately cover priority enrollment, and free programming, we would like to request that homeless students be included for highest priority enrollment.
- 5) **Another ask is to develop and implement a “Handle with Care” policy that could be rolled out at the start of the 2023-24 school year.** This is where SPD and SHA police have the expectation and a system to communicate any incidents of violence or peace disturbances on-site in SHA properties to the Principals of WHCIS and the Healey, so that the Principal and SPS can, at their discretion, offer sensitive supportive services, or implement restorative practices to the impacted students when they come to school. Such a system is used in other cities with positive results. We would welcome parents and teachers involvement in developing Somerville’s version of this policy. We believe that this policy will help because shootings that do not result in any physical harm to anyone are not reported by the SPD or by the SHA police, but they certainly have a profoundly negative impact on children, both academically and emotionally. Student Council’s letter calls attention to this.

Our ideas require no new money, no new regional policy changes, no new policing, although the Student Council has called for additional/enhanced policing and security measures. The WHCIS PTA has established a Health, Safety and Wellness Committee and will be spearheading much of our work because we know that children’s lives can be changed once parents are engaged and empowered. We know this is slow and hard work, and we are just getting started.

Please would you send us a few dates that work for you – just on the ideas described here? Our PTA contingent includes teachers who work most closely with Student Council, elected officers from WHCIS and the Healey PTAs, and parents who live in the Mystics, willing to fearlessly come forward. Again, because students want to remain anonymous, they have asked us to represent them. We are available on most days and want to meet at your convenience, but it would have to be after the school day ends.

Thank you so much for your consideration. We are excited and nervous about the work ahead, and look forward to making some headway together.

Uma Murugan and Emily Lalka
Sent on behalf of WHCIS PTA and Healey PTA