

SomerPromise: A Campaign for Student Success

SomerPromise is a community-wide effort to improve the educational outcomes of Somerville’s children and youth. We focus on aligning and mobilizing resources to address academic, social, and environmental factors that affect student success. SomerPromise is committed to equity and excellence in children’s lives during and out of school, from cradle to career.

VISION We envision a future in which...

- ✓ Each and every child in Somerville has an equal opportunity to succeed in school, college, career, and life.
- ✓ Families feel confident in their ability to guide their children’s learning and support their overall well-being.
- ✓ Our community has a collective sense of responsibility and togetherness when fostering student success in and outside of school.
- ✓ Our resources are aligned to address shared priorities based on evidence of what works.

Why Support SomerPromise?

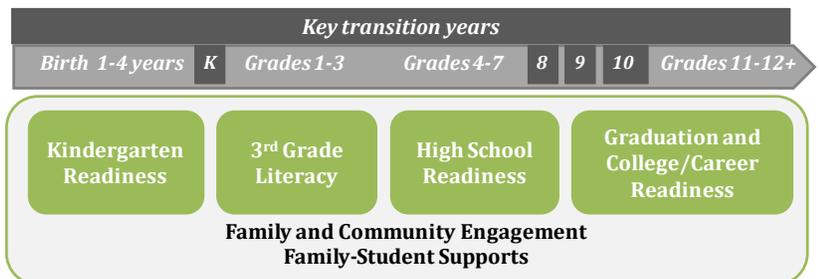
- ▶ **As a small city with many of the same challenges as larger cities, Somerville can demonstrate significant, systemic impact and serve as a model for other urban communities.** Somerville student demographics are similar to those of larger urban school districts (see sidebar), yet Somerville’s size makes it possible to improve student achievement in a consistent and sustainable manner. Through the model set by Somerville, cities can learn how to put in place policies and programs district-wide that address the relationship between low student achievement and social and economic factors.
- ▶ **Somerville is committed to collective action in order to effect bold, citywide change.** Long recognized for its innovative approach to government, Somerville was named in 2006 by the *Boston Globe Magazine* as “the best-run city in Massachusetts.” More recently, Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move! initiative highlighted the successes of Shape Up Somerville, a healthier lifestyles initiative originally developed as an obesity prevention project in partnership with Tufts University. Somerville has shown that citywide initiatives can have significant impact if they are based on shared goals, draw upon the strengths and creativity of the community, and can mobilize and align the right resources.
- ▶ **Supporting SomerPromise means investing smarter and accomplishing more.** SomerPromise organizes and strengthens the work of the city, Somerville Public Schools (SPS), and the community, thereby avoiding fragmented and duplicative efforts. By creating a shared vision for student success and a single, shared agenda, SomerPromise maximizes the impact of all.

Somerville Demographics

- **Population:** ~76,000
- **School district size:** ~5,000 students
- **% SPS students qualifying for free or reduced lunch:** 69% (*almost twice the state average*)
- **% SPS students with a first language other than English:** 51% (*about three times the state average*)
- **% of SPS students transferring in or out of the district during a school year:** 12.9% (*vs. 9.9% statewide*)

Framework for Somerville Student Success

SomerPromise has defined a “Framework for Somerville Student Success,” articulating key components that are critical to laying the foundation for success in school and life: kindergarten readiness, third grade literacy, high school readiness, and graduation and college/career readiness. Somerville recognizes that achieving these outcomes universally will involve effectively engaging families and community partners, and providing a range of family-student supports.



SomerPromise serves as both a link between school- and community-led initiatives, and a hub that connects and aligns programs that are working to foster student success.

Using Evidence to Drive Action: Kindergarten Readiness & Third Grade Literacy

While SomerPromise is committed to addressing all of the key components of the framework over time, our initial focus is on kindergarten readiness and third grade literacy.

Investing in early learning is proactive and cost effective - it reduces the challenges that can otherwise face children later in life as well as the costs associated with those challenges. Research shows that children who participate in pre-K not only have better reading skills in third grade, but are also less likely to require special education services, less likely to repeat a grade, and more likely to graduate high school.¹ **Three studies of pre-K programs for economically disadvantaged children have demonstrated returns between \$3 and \$10 for every dollar invested.**² During the early elementary years, students are gaining basic skills that are critical for later success. The National Research Council asserts that, “academic success as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted with reasonable accuracy knowing someone’s reading skill at the end of third grade.”³

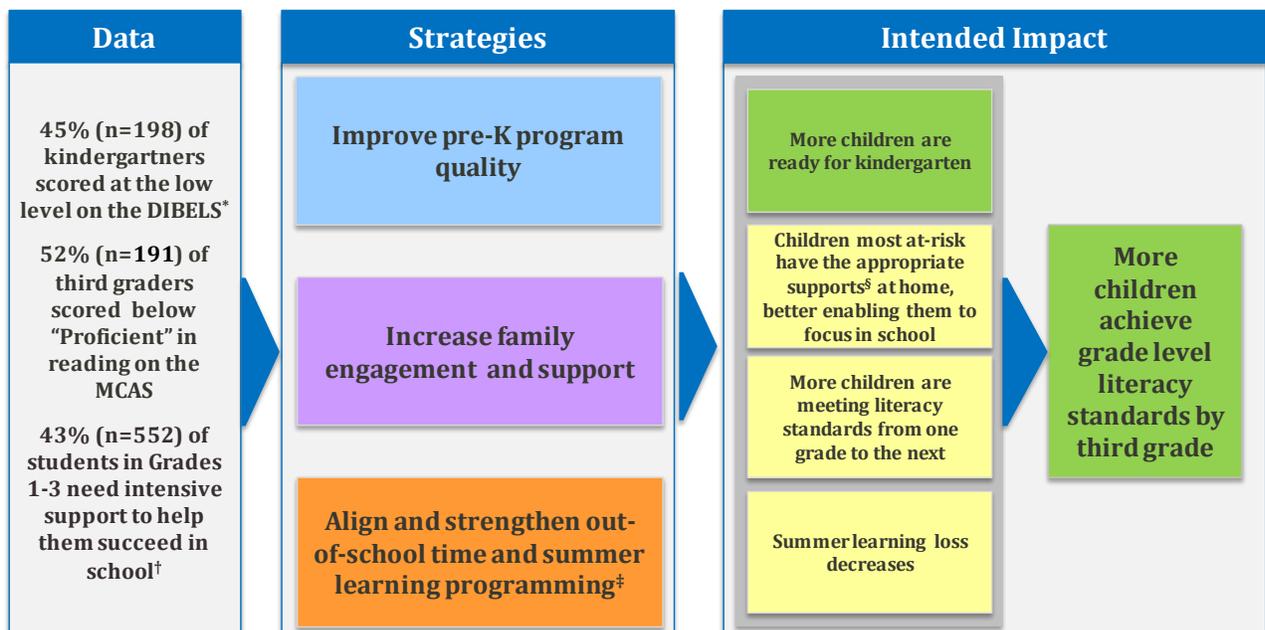
SomerPromise will complement and build upon what the schools are already doing. In both areas, SPS has momentum and existing assets to leverage (see sidebar). In particular, SomerPromise will focus on strategies at the interface of home, school, and community that align with and go beyond what schools are able to do on their own.

SPS Assets & Momentum

- Literacy coaches and reading intervention services district-wide
- Summer reading programs for incoming kindergarten students
- SMILE Pre-K Program, which serves approximately 40% of the city’s 4-year-old children each year
- \$160,000 in Race to the Top early learning funds to support birth to grade 3 alignment efforts through 2014
- Strong parent/guardian and community engagement through Somerville Family Learning Collaborative (SFLC) including the Parent Child Home Program (PCHP) and Literacy Playgroups
- District-wide implementation of a “balanced literacy” approach to instruction in all K-8 classrooms, now in its third year

Research supports Somerville’s proactive approach to working on kindergarten readiness and third grade literacy together. To read proficiently by the end of third grade, a growing body of evidence suggests that: children must be ready to succeed when they first start school in kindergarten (cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically); families need access to essential supports and services; and children need opportunities to participate in high-quality learning programs outside of school, particularly during the summer.⁴

The graphic below presents sample data on the status of early learners in Somerville, the strategies defined to date, and the intended impact. Community partners will play an integral role in further developing and implementing the strategies.



*The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are a set of measures that assess reading and pre-reading skills. The low level indicates a need for intensive instructional support to achieve subsequent early literacy goals.

†Includes risk level Tier 3 students, identified based on performance on state and local academic assessments (DIBELS, MAPS, MCAS) and ELL status

‡Discussion of integration of intensive in-school academic interventions is ongoing

§Includes supports related to health, home environment, and family stability

About SomerPromise

CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

Building on the concept of collaborative leadership, SomerPromise's priorities are aligned with those of the Somerville Public Schools, the City, and the community in order to ensure success. Our initial priority areas of kindergarten readiness and third grade literacy have been chosen based on discussions with a variety of stakeholders on what areas will have the greatest, most immediate impact on Somerville's students.

THE ROLE OF SOMERPROMISE

SomerPromise will serve as an intermediary organization that works across sectors to eliminate silos and deliver results—acting as a catalyst, convener and advocate for progress in its defined strategic areas. *SomerPromise will not typically run programs or initiatives; instead, we will work with community-based practitioners and across city and school departments in the development and implementation of evidence-based strategies, and will identify how to align resources accordingly, short-term and long-term.* SomerPromise will promote the strategic alignment of partner and volunteer efforts to support student success.



MONITORING PROGRESS

SomerPromise monitors progress toward its vision and goals by:

- Identifying indicators and regularly reporting on the status of Somerville students in the priority outcome areas
- Ensuring that each strategic initiative has a measurement plan that includes milestones and key success measures that are relevant to understanding progress in the priority outcome areas
- Gathering and synthesizing data across organizations as needed
- Reporting on the progress of strategic initiatives

ORGANIZATION

In 2009, Mayor Joseph Curtatone, the Somerville Public Schools, the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development at Tufts University, the Somerville Housing Authority, and many local nonprofit providers initiated SomerPromise as an effort to ensure an equal chance at success for every child in Somerville. In 2012, SomerPromise hired a director to further define, focus, and sustain the work.



SomerPromise will be led by staff with expertise in resource development, collaborative action, and data and research. Governing this work will be a Board of Directors, including the Mayor, the Superintendent, and other leaders in business, philanthropy, and education, committed to taking a collective approach to advancing SomerPromise's vision of success. Staff, board members, and other experts in the community will participate in working groups to define which strategies to pursue, how implementation will work, the resources required, and how to address resource gaps. The board will approve the plans that the working groups develop, including the amount of fundraising that SomerPromise will conduct each year on behalf of the initiatives.

SomerPromise facilitates coordination and collaboration among everyone whose efforts benefit students by taking a community approach both to goal setting and to focused action. Our aim is high-level, sustainable, collective impact.

Funding the Work of SomerPromise

SomerPromise initially plans to raise funds from private donors through grants and individual gifts to match the City's commitment of resources. These funds will enable SomerPromise to begin addressing its strategic priorities, starting with plans to support continued *improvement of pre-k program quality and accessibility, increase family engagement and support, and align, and strengthen out-of-school and summer learning*. In doing so, we will work to: 1) build a sustainable, community-wide movement so that every child in Somerville has the opportunity to succeed in school, college, career, and life; and 2) demonstrate for other urban school districts how to put in place policies and programs system-wide to address the relationship between low achievement and social and economic factors. Based on plans that develop through the working groups, we may do additional fundraising to support other strategies that emerge as data is available. SomerPromise seeks to build relationships with funders who want to invest along with the City of Somerville in the success of Somerville's children and youth. We especially welcome those who are interested in the opportunity to show that bold system change can really happen.

Funding and other types of support that SomerPromise generates will be used to:

- Better direct resources toward strategic priorities
- Seed and support efforts for which public dollars are not yet available
- Catalyze and align additional public and private investment

Accountability and transparency are guiding principles of SomerPromise's work. SomerPromise will carefully monitor and report on use of funds and progress toward defined goals.

How to Get Involved

Community involvement is essential for SomerPromise's success. Here are some of the ways you can help:

- **ATTEND** one of SomerPromise's meetings or events
- **DONATE** time, money or other in-kind resources to support SomerPromise's work
- **SHARE** your knowledge of what students need and your success in addressing those needs through evidence-based work
- **CALL** to learn about more ways to get involved

For more information, contact Anna Fox Doherty at adoherty@somervillema.gov or at 617-625-6600 x2341.

SomerPromise Partners in Collective Action

SomerPromise has a growing list of partners, many of whom supported the work in its earliest days and continue to play an important role in ensuring its success:

- City of Somerville Office of the Mayor and youth-serving departments (including Recreation, Libraries, Health)
- Somerville Public Schools
- Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development, Tufts University
- Community-based organizations serving children, youth, and families
- Somerville Housing Authority



¹The Center for Public Education. Starting Out Right: Pre-K and Kindergarten. 2011. www.centerforpubliceducation.org

²The Urban Child Institute. Pre-K Matters: Exploring the Impact of Pre-Kindergarten on Children and Their Communities. 2012. www.urbanchildinstitute.org

³National Research Council. Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children. 1998.

⁴Annie E. Casey Foundation. Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters. 2010. www.aecf.org