

## **EDUCATION POLICY COMMITTEE: TOP THREE POLICIES**

Our committee was made up of community members from across the city. We had representatives from several early childhood centers/preschools, the Superintendent of SPS, former and current SPS employees, parents, and many members from Stamford's wonderful community organizations. Everyone was very engaged and we had three very productive meetings. We decided that Mayor Simmons and her team should begin her term by focusing on the following three policies regarding education in Stamford.

### **Priority #1: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

1. Stamford needs a *cohesive* and *equitable* early childhood education program for ALL children from Birth to age 5
2. Coordination with the ALL the partners is critical. We need to strengthen collaboration between Stamford Early Childhood leaders and the Cradle to Career Early Childhood Network; collaborate with childcare leaders in other Connecticut towns; join Child Care for CT's Future, a newly launched statewide campaign "to reshape, reimagine and grow childcare for Connecticut's parents".
3. Strengthen Stamford's Early Childhood Council and include the Mayor (or designee) and the Superintendent (or designee).
4. Mayor should appoint a head of Early Childhood Education/Office of Early Childhood education, in charge of managing all the programs located in Stamford (Donna Acuri does this now, but the consensus was that she needs more help)  
<https://www.stamfordct.gov/government/view-all-city-departments/school-readiness-preschool-program>
5. Develop high quality *standards* to address the inequity gap evident between programs throughout the city
6. Determine how the Build Back Better act affects our new policy: when will funds be available? We need to plan for these expected funds so we can hit the ground running
7. There is a great need for quality educators in the early childhood field: we need to provide better pay, more training, a career path for the new teachers (several members of our committee were put in touch with the Workforce Planning Committee. Also, this need will be addressed by SPS Career Pathways program)
8. We should study Norwalk's ECE program to figure out their best practices and what works best for them. <https://www.norwalkct.org/1510/Early-Childhood>

\*\*Stamford's program could and should be a pilot for the state of CT

### **First Steps**

1. Perform a needs assessment of all current staffing in downtown office and all ECE providers in Stamford. <https://www.stamfordct.gov/government/view-all-city-departments/school-readiness-preschool-program>

2. Update the list of ECE providers located on City's website, create an easy-to-update database, make it easier to find
3. Begin development of a long-term Strategic Plan for Early Childhood programming with input from SPS, the City, Cradle to Career and the Early Childhood Council, and the Alliance for Black Achievement, with a theory of actions, goals, objectives and metrics.
4. Begin to determine funding sources (outside of BBB Act)

## **Priority #2: FACILITIES**

1. The city owns all of SPS's buildings, and so the city has to take over the problems associated with them, so that Superintendent can get back to running the schools and educational programs
2. The Long-Term Facilities Committee has been meeting for well over a year, Mayor Simmons has been part of this group and has an idea of what is been happening over the past few years.
3. SLAM is in the middle of an audit of every building and the draft report will be ready Dec/January
4. Community engagement/feedback on the report will be important
5. Superintendent and Mayor hopefully will be on the same page and provide a united front in presenting the report to the community

### **First Steps**

1. Work with Superintendent and staff to develop list of questions for community feedback sessions for early 2022
2. We need to determine what criteria will we use to interpret data from SLAM report
3. Research funding sources: grants, ESSER funds, interdistrict options, etc.

## **Priority #3: MENTAL HEALTH/SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

1. Students and staff alike have experienced many mental health issues over the past 2 years
2. City must work with schools (and community at large) to provide a robust SEL program to help combat the effects of the past couple of years
3. We need someone/group to coordinate the many community partners who provide mental health services
4. Also need more social workers/mental health providers across the schools and city, and need a list of therapists who work with children/young adults
5. More bilingual therapists/social workers are needed
6. Provide training for teachers, parents, city employees on restorative justice practices
7. Encourage students to go into the field in HS (workplace learning program)
8. All students should be required to volunteer to help teach empathy

**First Steps**

1. Begin city-wide education campaign to teach about mental health (not everyone knows about signs/symptoms/therapies)
2. Compile list of city-wide therapists/social workers/other mental health professionals
3. Determine funding sources to provide restorative justice practices city-wide (grants, etc)

**Priority #4: PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF SPS**

One other area to focus on came up at the Town Hall on Monday, November 29<sup>th</sup>. We need to work on the perception of Stamford Public Schools both within Stamford and also in the surrounding area. Those of us whose children attend SPS know how great the schools are, but there are many who feel that the education isn't as good as it should be (according to them). The Superintendent just hired a new PR person who will work on this, but the Mayor's office can do a lot to help with this going forward.

We would also like to propose that our committee continue to meet every 4 months or so to monitor progress on these policies.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stephanie O'Shea and Bianca Shinn