

SOMSD 2020: Intentional Integration and Innovation

SOMSD is in the process of a two-pronged initiative to address health and safety issues in our facilities and expand our capacity to meet growing enrollment, and to ensure that our schools are fully integrated.

Facilities

The repairs, renovation and new construction are one track of the work, and are incorporated in the Long Range Facilities Plan which received preliminary approval from the Board of Education on November 19, 2018. Details of the plan are available [here](#). Next steps in that process are:

- Presenting the approved recommendations to the Board of School Estimate, which is responsible for bonding,
- Having the architects develop detailed drawings,
- Obtaining state approval for the projects
- Final approval from the Board of Education
- Approval for bonding from the Board of School Estimate

Integration and Innovation

SOMSD 2020: Intentional Integration and Innovation is the second track of the work. This initiative focuses on equity and access, including developing an integration plan that ensures that the student populations in each of our schools are reflective of our district's diversity, and on fostering innovation in our elementary schools.

Dr. Edward Fergus, an Assistant Professor at Temple University who has worked with over 65 school districts since 2004 on educational equity and school reform, is working with a committee of elementary school principals, other staff members, and parents, to guide this work. The committee is charged with imagining and planning the educational and affective components of the District's long range facilities and integration plan. Together, they are reimagining instruction, particularly elementary instruction, focused on innovation and controlled choice.

Controlled Choice is an approach to school integration designed to create diverse, academically rigorous schools with equal access to educational resources. School assignments aim to match families to their choices of school; however family choice is balanced against the district's interest in creating equitable schools, as well as programmatic factors such as balancing enrollment sizes. Benefits include:

- Families have the ability to seek out a structure and teaching approach that fits their children's needs;
- District eliminates future rezoning needs in response to evolving housing and demographic patterns;
- Families do not need to change elementary schools if they move within the two towns;
- Students have greater opportunities to experience the rich diversity of our community.

The goal is to ensure that all of our schools are welcoming and engaging learning environments, with a strong foundation in cultural competency and social justice, so that each and every student is challenged, inspired and supported to develop their potential as learners and citizens.

Community Engagement

Dr. Fergus and Elizabeth Aaron, Principal on Special Assignment for SOMSD 2020, presented an overview on the goals and work of the initiative, and led a community conversation on innovation and integration on October 25, 2018. You can view their presentation [here](#) and their PowerPoint [here](#). More community conversations and events around this work will be scheduled over the course of the school year.

We look forward to continued engagement with you around this work, and around our shared values of equity, excellence, and opportunity for all students in SOMSD.

Please contact Ms. Aaron with questions, comments or feedback at eaaron@somsd.k12.nj.us or 973-762-5600 ext. 1852.