

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

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AYESHA M. WILSON

C21-331

--In School Committee--

10/05/2021

Ordered:

WHEREAS: Language justice is the fundamental right every person has to communicate, to understand and to be understood in the language(s) and method in which they feel most comfortable, which includes the communication rights of individuals with preferred languages other than English as well as person with communication-related disabilities; and

WHEREAS: Language justice provides an opportunity for the Cambridge Public Schools to reframe their commitment to students and their families by ensuring that all individuals, regardless of the way they communicate, are valued, respected, and have the opportunity to participate fully in the democratic and social processes of the community; and

WHEREAS: About 6% of Cambridge Public Schools students are English Language Learners according to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and 5% of persons 5-17 lack access at home to a computer, the internet or both according to the 2015-19 American Community Survey; and

WHEREAS: Plain language in all forms of written communications gets information across in the shortest time possible, allows more people to quickly understand the message, simplifies translation into other languages, and helps make information more accessible to wider audiences; and

WHEREAS: The Cambridge Public Schools is dedicated and continues to work on improving family engagement and ensure everyone has meaningful relationships and equitable access to information, resources, and services, especially for underrepresented, underserved communities, and the most vulnerable students and their families, including, but not limited to, communities of color, persons with disabilities, and individuals for whom English is not the preferred language for communication, either verbal or written; and

WHEREAS: Language justice is a critical tool to effectively engage with families, and the School Committee has already adopted a resolution to its commitment to family engagement; and

WHEREAS: The Cambridge Public Schools has made significant progress and investments in language access in recent years as part of its ongoing work to be more inclusive, welcoming, and effective in family communication practices; and

WHEREAS: Over the last year the Family Policy Council established a Language Justice Working Group comprised of representatives from the City, schools, and community partners that gathered information from those who live and work in Cambridge, reviewed existing demographic data, researched what Cambridge and other communities are doing to address language access issues, and developed recommendations; and

WHEREAS: By focusing on language justice, the Cambridge Public Schools can increase the number and ways in which families in Cambridge interact with and are connected to their schools, as well as improve students'™ engagement, sense of belonging, and overall performance in

school; and


WHEREAS: Implementing a language justice policy is an important step in the path towards language justice in the Cambridge Public Schools and will result in a stronger community with increased engagement, partnership, belonging, and trust; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the Superintendent be and is hereby requested to direct appropriate school department staff to design a Language Access Plan in conjunction with the City, which builds off of the work already in progress, and includes a shared template for the City, unified strategy, phased roll-out, timeline, budget, staffing, and goals to ensure all Cambridge Public School families will be understood, valued, and have equitable access to all available services and resources; and be it further

RESOLVED: The Superintendent is requested to provide the School Committee information about the appropriate funding to support implementation of the Language Access Plan as part of the FY23 budget process.

A true copy:

Manikka L. Bowman
Vice Chair



c:
Mayor Siddiqui
Member Wilson

Motion # 21-305