



December 12, 2011

Dear Mayor Curtatone,

We have spent the past month talking about health in our community in our intermediate English class. Eight of the 16 students in the class live in affordable housing in Somerville, and many of them have faced health issues, ranging from asthma to high blood pressure, diabetes, and cancer. Health is something that they take seriously. They have lived here in Somerville for as short as 10 months, and as long as 30 years. Most do not have cars and rely on the built environment and public transportation to get around town. They're incredibly familiar with the local resources and public systems.

In order to come to these ideas, we looked at surveys filled out by 4 of the other Welcome Project English classes, in which students talked about how physically active they are and how much healthy food they get on a regular basis. After small group activities comparing the ease of being healthy in their countries of origins and here in the United States, students discussed what makes it difficult to engage in health promoting activities in their daily lives here in Somerville, and brainstormed on what would make it easier. Finally, students voted on which problems and solutions they felt were most important, and that is what we'd like to share with you today. The other ideas that were discussed are also of value, and are included below.

I feel it's important for you to know that several of the students from our class who participated in this process are not here for the full range of reasons – some of which are exciting and others of which are upsetting – but all reflect the real and daily challenges of immigrant communities in Somerville. Diego is at his second day at a new job, Kengy is in the first day of a training program she was just accepted to, Dany and Jose are both recovering from surgery, and another student is in an inpatient clinic for a stress related breakdown. They are here with us in spirit. Thank you for taking the time to meet with us.

Sincerely,

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WALKING

1. Walking is dangerous in the Mystic neighborhood. There are some specific changes that would make it easier:
 - a. We need the walk sign at the traffic light and crosswalk in front of the Mystic to be longer. You have to run to get across it.
 - b. We need a sidewalk or crosswalk at Mystic and Middlesex because there is none. It's very dangerous to walk to the store.
 - c. We need a sidewalk on the right of the street walking to Stop and Shop.
 - d. We need the sidewalks to be fixed at Jacques street, and the intersection of Broadway and Temple Street.

FRESH FOOD

2. We don't have enough time to exercise or to cook fresh food. We want there to be more good jobs in Somerville so that we can have more time to be healthy!
3. We want a farmers market on Mystic Ave. in both the summer and winter, but it must be cheap. We can't afford expensive prices for vegetables.
4. There aren't cheap fruits and vegetables close to the Mystic. We want a supermarket at the old Star Market location. Stop and Shop is very expensive, and there is limited public transportation to the Market Basket.

BUSSES:

5. We need another bus route that comes from the Mystic. We need to be able to get to Union Square, Somerville Hospital, and the Cambridge Hospital.
6. We want affordable rates at the YMCA for seniors and transportation from the Mystic, or to have an exercise program for seniors close to the Mystic.
7. We want to be able to get change when we pay cash on busses, like we can at a train station. Right now if you have a \$10 bill, all of the money goes on to the Charlie Card. We need the cash.

There are some other ideas which are important to us, though to less of the students.

Middle priority

8. We need a better bus schedule. It doesn't come very often. We want the #95 bus to run more often on the weekends.
9. We want more lights at the public parks so that it's safer.
10. We want a cooking class so that people who don't know how to cook can learn, and don't have to eat expensive unhealthy foods at restaurants all the time.

Lowest priority

11. It's dangerous to walk when snow is not removed.
 - a. Force the owners of buildings to clean the snow.
 - b. Tell people where they can shovel snow when there is no more space on the sidewalks.
 - c. Maybe you put a sign where there is a lot of ice underneath the snow so that people don't slip on it.
12. We need more parks, so that parks are within 10 minutes walking time. For example, Meacham Street doesn't have a good park.
13. We want people to teach different kinds of activities and exercises for adults at parks, like soccer, basketball, or yoga.

41 English students at the Welcome Projects answered these questions about health. Here is what they said.

1. Do you go to the park?
32 Yes, I do. 8 No, I don't.
2. Do you walk to work?
14 Yes, I do. 26 No, I don't.
3. Do you take the bus?
24 Yes, I do. 16 No, I don't.
4. Do you ride a bike to work?
4 Yes, I do. 35 No, I don't.
5. Do you go to a gym?
8 Yes, I do. 32 No, I don't.
6. Do you walk every day?
28 Yes, I do. 12 No, I don't.
7. Do you get exercise every day?
15 Yes, I do. 24 No, I don't.
8. Do you think about what you eat?
33 Yes, I do. 4 No, I don't.
9. Do you cook a lot?
23 Yes, I do. 14 No, I don't.
10. Do you drink a lot of soda?
9 Yes, I do. 29 No, I don't.
11. Do you eat a lot of fast food?
6 Yes, I do. 30 No, I don't.
12. Do you eat fresh fruit and vegetables?
32 Yes, I do. 5 No, I don't.