

Five years ago, having voted in BOE elections, leaders of SOMA Justice realized that it was challenging for residents to easily plug into the Board of Education races and the stances of candidates, especially on issues of equity, social justice, and access. In particular, the debate-centric approach in the community required that most concerned and engaged parents find additional evening time to attend events if they wanted to hear from a BOE member firsthand. SOMA Justice proposed a scorecard as a public service that would help people more easily learn from and connect with the goals of BOE candidates.

In 2017, SOMA Justice [reached out to several community groups](#) that were explicitly committed to these values to ask if they wanted to help co-create a scorecard that would help evaluate and provide information on candidates for like-minded community members. PARES (Parents in Partnership for Respect and Equity in SOMA Schools) joined as a founding scorecard partner. To date, the scorecard/BOE candidate responses have been accessed thousands of times in recent elections.

However, in recent years, the leaders of SOMA Justice have noticed a gap in some BOE members' stated stances on the scorecard and their failure to stay true to those positions once elected. The inability for people in the public to understand and evaluate incumbents also provides a unique issue to address. We believe that true leaders should be open to communicating with the community, have a desire to help those families most likely to fall through cracks, stick to the principles they state when they campaign, and, most importantly, focus on meeting the needs of students – especially the most vulnerable students in our towns.

We've seen progress made -- the BOE has moved forward with the intentional integration plan, passed policies that ease students' burdens in terms of loans and fines, honored enslaved peoples through the memorial renaming of a school, and added Know Your Rights and consent lessons to our curriculum. But we've also seen BOE leadership reduce the amount of time community members can speak at meetings, threaten to eliminate bylaws that allow community presentations, downplay or ignore parents and students who experience discrimination, fail to open up democratic spaces like town halls or other ways to interact with people in the community who do not know them personally, and focus on infighting and Board politics rather than the critical issues impacting our children.

Current BOE members do not come from the neighborhoods most impacted by the changes implemented in the integration plan and with the lowest SES levels. This lack of perspective and input produces an imbalance that is difficult to breach with equity keywords and symbolic gestures. This makes living out these principles on the BOE – rather than grievance politics – even more important.

We have realized that without an evaluation of how BOE candidates perform once elected, the scorecard is incomplete. Moreover, this scorecard as public service work has come with harassment, malignment, and targeting from the very worst of community members – often in collaboration with sitting BOE members. SOMA Justice is led by working mothers who, collectively, have delivered 5 children since the scorecard was launched (with one on the way!). These steep costs are only worth it if they provide the public with honest and clear information.

Over the years, SOMA Justice has organized to pay off all student lunch debts and advocate for policies to remove discriminatory lunch and library fine policies, provided monthly food and emergency aid support to SOMA families, advocated for developmentally-appropriate and inclusive safety and security policies, committed to expanding transformative justice practices inside and outside of schools, collaborated with community groups providing clothing and other necessary goods to students and

families, organized community education events, offered support and advice to underrepresented families navigating school bureaucracies, and more.

This year, we will take a step back and take the time to rethink and expand the scorecard metrics. We hope, too, that people will give us feedback to improve this tool as a form of public service. We will also take this time to rest, reflect, and restore. Thanks to those folks who have supported this scorecard over the last few years and found it important. We'll be back.