

Kids' Council

Year-End Report 2012-13



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
2012-13 Area of Focus.....	4
Kids' Council/CET Outreach & Family Engagement Survey.....	5
<i>Promising Practices for Family Engagement in Cambridge</i> Networking Event.....	6
City-wide Family Engagement Policy.....	7
Youth Involvement Subcommittee.....	8
Next Steps for the Kids' Council.....	9
Additional Information from the <i>Promising Practices for Family Engagement in Cambridge</i> Networking Event.....	10
Family Engagement from the YOUTH Perspective.....	13

INTRODUCTION

The Kids' Council, officially known as the Coordinating Council for Children, Youth and Families was created in 1991. It is chaired by the Mayor, and its members include residents, elected officials, department heads within the City, community and non-profit leaders, business, early childhood, philanthropic, university, and youth representatives. The Council is dedicated to developing policy and program recommendations aimed at improving the quality of life for children, youth and families in the city of Cambridge.

In April 2012, The Kids' Council agreed to develop strategic goals capable of making the greatest impact on children in Cambridge. The Kids' Council quickly identified "Family Engagement" as a top priority, and turned to the Community Engagement Team (CET)* as one of our community's most vital resources in reaching families who are at risk of being alienated from opportunities and supportive services in Cambridge. The Kids' Council developed recommendations and agreed to leverage its resources to enhance the capacity of the CET.

The Process

After determining the area of focus for the year, representatives of the Kids' Council, the CET and the Cambridge Public Schools created an ad-hoc working group to develop a Work Plan.

First, the Kids' Council recommended additional funding to the CET budget so that they will have the capacity to hire additional outreach workers, increase their hours, and develop a city-wide training program for outreach workers and others involved in family engagement efforts. The City Manager included this request in the FY2014 budget, and it was adopted by the City Council. In addition, the Cambridge Public Schools committed to financially support the expansion of the CET's work with the schools and their families.

The next step was to survey existing service providers and educators about opportunities, needs, and gaps in family engagement. The results of this family engagement survey can be found at www.cambridgema.gov/kidscouncil.

In May 2013, the Kids' Council and CET hosted a networking event that gave providers in Cambridge an opportunity to review the survey results, share promising practices, learn new outreach and engagement strategies, develop means for overcoming barriers, and help shape the Kids' Council's policy and budget recommendations.

Simultaneously, the Mayor convened a group to discuss developing a city-wide family engagement policy. The results of the *Outreach and Family Engagement Survey* and provider input gathered at the networking event will inform the city-wide family engagement policy.

This report provides an overview of what the Kids' Council accomplished in 2012-13 and will help guide us as we continue our work around family engagement.

*The Community Engagement Team (CET)

The CET, a multi-agency collaborative, reaches out to under-served Cambridge families and connects them to community events and resources, develops community leaders, and supports agencies in working with a diverse community. CET hires, trains and deploys immigrant and minority outreach workers. The CET outreach workers are members of the community who provide information about community services and activities to a diverse group of Cambridge families.

2012-13 AREA OF FOCUS

CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING AN AREA OF FOCUS

The Kids' Council developed and agreed upon criteria for choosing an area of focus. They used this list of criteria to figure out what would be the best way for the Council to proceed.

1. Utilizes the strengths and resources of the members and Executive Director of the Kids' Council and offers clear ways for them to contribute.
2. Enhances the capacity of the Kids' Council, providers, agencies and networks to continually learn from families and incorporate the voices, the needs and strengths of families with an emphasis on families who historically don't have a voice.
3. Addresses articulated community needs.
4. Builds on existing and already planned initiatives, rather than being duplicative.
5. Aligns with the function and purpose of the Kids' Council as stated in the ordinance.
6. Enhances the ability of all families (with emphasis on families with fewer opportunities for access, voice, and participation) to access resources and help providers reach families
7. Benchmarks can be developed to track progress toward desired outcomes and where possible use existing data and information.
8. Recognizes the resources and relationships needed at the onset.
9. Takes something on where we can show progress within a year.
10. Creates opportunities for partnership.
11. Initiative will be visible to the people we are trying to reach.

AREA OF FOCUS

The Kids' Council also examined various issues around family engagement and ultimately chose between the following 6 topics:

1. *In order to fulfill their Vision and Mission of Successful Family Engagement in Cambridge, the Kids' Council agreed to develop recommendations necessary to enhance the capacity of the Community Engagement Team (CET). The Kids' Council will also utilize and leverage its resources to support the recommendations.
2. Inventory of resources available to families and a clear system for keeping information current and disseminating it to families and providers
3. Develop a plan for a full service City-wide Family Resource Center that could include resources, information and training for families and providers
4. Develop a City-wide approach to providing translation and interpretation resources to families and providers
5. Develop a comprehensive set of competencies and strategies for providers in Cambridge to effectively engage families
6. Develop a plan to address the "digital access divide" with respect to engagement between the "City" and families, while recognizing rapid changes in technology

*At the conclusion of the process, the Kids' Council members came to consensus and picked focusing on enhancing the capacity of the CET. There was basically a tie between 1, 2, 3, and 4, and there seemed to be a great deal of support for #4 and #3. In the end, the group voted for #4.

KIDS' COUNCIL/CET OUTREACH & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

The *Outreach and Family Engagement Survey* was developed by members of the Kids' Council, CET, and Cambridge Public Schools and sent to members of city, school and community providers and educators who work with our families and their children. Almost 90% of the 175 providers who took the survey stated that they serve city-wide rather than individual neighborhoods.

Some of the most interesting highlights in this report include:

- The top rated engagement strategies were individual meetings with families, families are welcome to visit, community meetings with families, phone calls and email. The data collected also highlights the importance of personal connections and developing strong relationships WITH families.
- The biggest barrier to engagement is definitely TIME. Most survey participants stated they find it challenging to find the time to do the work, supervise, coordinate, and evaluate the efforts. Also, many reported that lack of funding relates to time because providers do not have funds to hire additional staff or compensate current staff more for their time to do outreach and engage with families.
- 44.3% of participants indicated that language and translation issues were barriers to outreach and engagement with families.
- 86.3% of the survey participants would like to collaborate with others regarding family engagement. Many of those respondents are interested in attending forums and workshops. The most popular topics include:
 - Share promising practices in outreach and family engagement
 - How to work effectively with specific cultures and communities
 - Learn about the resources and services available in Cambridge
 - Share translation and interpretation services and resources
 - Organize focus groups or community conversations with families to find out what they need and want

DEFINITION OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

163 of the Outreach and Family Engagement survey respondents defined the term "Family Engagement" by telling us what they think effective "Family Engagement" looks like. In summary, most responses focused on the importance of relationships with families, which are a 2-way partnership grounded in respect, trust and listening. They believe it is important that providers are welcoming and not only support students and their learning, but also support them with awareness and access to resources and services available. In order for this to happen successfully, 2-way communication and collaboration is necessary; therefore, families should be included, involved, and participate.

Outcomes of Effective "Family Engagement"

- Children and youth are healthy, safe, educated, and civically engaged
- Families are active in knowing their needs and how to get help
- Families are active in the community and support each other

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN CAMBRIDGE NETWORKING EVENT

On May 23, 2013, the Kids' Council and CET hosted a networking event, and 125 providers and educators attended. Approximately 50% of the participants completed the evaluation after the event, and here is some of the feedback:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Gave me specific information	0	4	36	25	65
Interested me, in general	0	0	22	44	66
Added to my knowledge about family engagement	0	2	36	27	65
Changed my thinking about my agency's practices	1	14	36	12	63
Provided me with useful resources	0	7	44	14	65

Introduction by Heather Weiss (Harvard Family Research Project)

- Given that one of the most powerful predictors of kids' success is engaged families and learning happens everywhere and at every point in a child's development, family engagement must be our shared responsibility and there should be a social contract that includes the whole array of agencies and families in Cambridge.
- The city should create the conditions necessary for families to be engaged and able to support their children's development
- Although it is challenging, we must continue to work on it. Some of our challenges include:
 - Not all families have the social and cultural capital.
 - Not everyone believes FE is the strongest predictor of kids' success, etc...
 - Family engagement needs to continue through adolescence.
 - Ensure that parents have the knowledge and skills to access what they need.
 - Build on families' strengths and support their desires for their children.
 - Be sensitive to different cultures and barriers that make involvement difficult.

Summary

- Family engagement leads to student achievement.
- Substantive family engagement takes resources – funding, dedicated staff, time and energy.
- Takes trained dedicated staff with support from supervisors.
- Relationships are key, which is slow and gradual work.
- Recruit from the community to reach the community. Tap into your own knowledge base. Who do we already serve who has connections with a specific community? Who at your workplace has connections with a specific community? These people can help us understand and overcome assumptions about why some parents don't engage.
- Partnerships with community based organizations and the schools matter.

Go to page 10 for more information from the networking event.

CITY-WIDE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

The Mayor convened a group to discuss the development and implementation of a city-wide policy regarding family engagement, and the Kids' Council will continue working on the policy in 2013-14.

Kids' Council vision regarding family engagement

Successful Family Engagement in Cambridge is creating and supporting genuine partnerships grounded in respect between families and the organizations and institutions that serve them; so that:

- *Families can easily access appropriate information, resources, services and programs in order to obtain the care and opportunities they desire for their children.*
- *All providers welcome families and encourage their input regarding decisions affecting children and youth.*
- *Providers intentionally build community with families and work to ensure ALL families feel included.*

Rationale for a city-wide family engagement policy in Cambridge

- We can use a policy as a reference point.
- There are many groups who are currently working on outreach and family engagement, and now we have an opportunity to build on all these efforts in a cohesive manner.
- A great opportunity for more alignment and clarity on where we want to go and how we are going to get there.
- The policy should be the lens our agencies will use when looking at paying for and supporting programs.
- There is a great deal of research that supports the importance of family engagement.

Family engagement policy should include:

- City, schools, and community based organizations AND families in partnership.
- The need to make it easier for families to access resources and information.
- A definition of "family engagement" and a description of what it would look like for the various programs and different age groups.
- Policy language that is accessible and understood by everyone.
- How we can further support families.
- Language regarding *translation* and *transitions*.

Steps to successful implementation

- Recommend city-wide family engagement policy
- Develop guiding principles for implementation
- Create a system of monitoring, tracking, and reporting
- Solicit pledges from service providers
- Collect and share stories that illustrates the impact of the policy
- Acknowledge successes and move towards institutionalizing policy

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE (YIS)

The Youth Involvement Subcommittee (YIS) is the youth civic engagement component of the Cambridge Kids' Council. YIS is comprised of a diverse group of young people ages 14 to 18 and is youth led and adult supported. Each year, the YIS works on projects related to the Kids' Council's goals and topics that are of interest to the young people. This year the YIS members decided to work with middle school students to help them with the transition to high school, understand what to expect when they get there, and how to get involved and engaged.

The YIS have gone to several events in the city to reach out to middle school students and provide them with information. They have prepared and presented a series of interactive workshops at several out of school time programs in Cambridge and partnered with Upper Schools and STARS to reach as many middle school students and their family members as possible. From their experiences facilitating workshops, they created informational videos to give their advice and answer the most frequent questions. They are using various forms of social media to engage with future high school students.

The YIS also worked with Heather Weiss and the Harvard Family Research Project on family engagement issues. The Harvard Family Research Project is using what they have learned from the YIS members to further their work on family engagement. The YIS created a presentation based on their perspectives of family engagement, and they presented their findings to the Kids' Council, Cambridge School Committee, and Cambridge Rindge and Latin School Council.

The YIS are committed to continuing this work next year and work more closely with the Kids' Council.

Please “like” the Cambridge Youth Subcommittee on Facebook.

Go to page 13 for more information from about the youth perspective on Family Engagement.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE KIDS’ COUNCIL

- Review feedback and results from the Kids’ Council/CET Outreach and Family Engagement Survey and Promising Practices for Family Engagement Networking Event
- Continue developing city-wide family engagement policy and implementation plan
 - Make sure it is supported and implemented
 - Develop protocols/guidelines and get agencies to sign on and endorse
- Continue collaboration with CET
- Explore ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and its impact on family engagement
- Include families and empower parents
 - Bring families into the work
 - Find out how families access information
 - Include the youth voice
 - Look at the best way to communicate what resources are available for children, youth, and families in Cambridge
- Review the 2012-13 list of Areas of Focus
 1. Inventory of resources available to families and a clear system for keeping information current and disseminating it to families and providers.
 2. Develop a plan for a full service city-wide Family Resource Center that could include resources, information and training for families and providers.
 3. Develop a city-wide approach to providing translation and interpretation resources to families and providers.
 4. **Enhance the capacity of the CET to allow it to engage more families.**
 5. Develop a comprehensive set of competencies and strategies for providers in Cambridge to effectively engage families.
 6. Develop a plan to address the “digital access divide” with respect to engagement between the “City” and families, while recognizing rapid changes in technology.
- Youth Involvement Subcommittee
 - Help families with college process, planning, and scholarships
 - Continue work with middle school students and their transition to high school
 - Keep a strong YIS and KC partnership
 - Networking breakfast between KC and YIS in the beginning of the year
- Schedule presentations for 2013-14 Kids’ Council meetings
 - Cambridge Public Schools and their work around family engagement
 - Updates from CET
 - Updates from YIS
 - ACES (Healthy Children Task Force)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FROM THE PROMISING PRACTICES FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN CAMBRIDGE NETWORKING EVENT

Agenda

- Registration/Continental Breakfast/Networking
- Welcome by Mayor Davis and Mina Reddy
- Introduction by Heather Weiss (Harvard Family Research Project)
- Overview of findings from the *Kids' Council/CET Outreach and Family Engagement Survey* by Ellen Semonoff and Carolyn Turk
- Small Group Activity - review the results of the *Outreach and Family Engagement Survey*
- Balloon Exercise by Michelle Godfrey
- Small Group Activity - discuss two different parent story about family engagement, identify barriers, share promising practices, and learn new strategies concerning family engagement (Stories were provided by the CET outreach workers based on their own experiences)
- Report back findings from small group activity
- Next Steps/Action Planning by Carole Sousa
- Lunch and Informal Networking

Survey Feedback from the Networking Event

- Plan a follow-up networking event
- Revisit the Kids' Council Vision for Successful Family Engagement in Cambridge
- Develop a definition of Family Engagement and explore what it would look like for the various programs and different age groups
- Include families and youth in the work around family engagement
- Work with the Cambridge Public Schools (CPS), so that family contact information can be shared with outreach workers and other city and community partners
- Advocate for funding so that there is more time to do outreach and engagement work
- The CET model of essentially providing 1:1 case management support for families should be supported and expanded throughout the city
- Provide more professional development opportunities
- Address the needs of both immigrant families and American born families
- Provide more opportunities for providers to collaborate with each other and overcome barriers
- Create parent leadership opportunities
- Figure out who we are trying to reach and why
- Develop systems so that we are more proactive and engage with families before a crisis
- Staff should reflect the diversity of the participants in their programs/classrooms, and given that this does not always happen, we need to make sure everyone feels included and is able to help no matter what demographic they represent
- Create the infrastructure to pass families along during transitions
- Look into the impact of
 - Social networking
 - Texting
 - Home visits
 - Homelessness

Feedback from the Parent Stories:

- Common Themes
 - Establish partnerships and make connections with families
 - Listen
 - Communicate
 - Respect families decisions and point of view
 - Trauma sensitive lens
- Barriers
 - Time
 - Relationship not established with families
 - Shame/denial
 - Families not used to engaging with institutions
 - Some people are shy and might not want to participate
 - Families might want to check it out first
 - What will people think of me? What will I wear?
 - Issue presented in a negative way re: the child's "problems"
 - Family Issues
 - Cost
 - Childcare
 - Transportation
 - Parents can get overwhelmed by the services being offered
 - Families have multiple priorities and issues
 - Lack of information about options and benefits of after school programs versus babysitting
 - There's a need to know the culture, but this is extremely difficult because there are so many cultures in Cambridge. You can't know all of them.
- Strategies
 - Opportunities to connect with families
 - Home visit
 - Call at different times
 - Leave a clear message on the phone
 - Invite families to visit
 - Keep calling. Keep making the offer
 - Use drop-off and pick-up times to talk to parent
 - Connect parent with other parent who has a child in out of school time programs so they can talk about what goes on there
 - Children can connect families with programs
 - Refer the family to another provider if the service needed is beyond what you can supply
 - Make an effort to spend time with the parent
 - Build relationships
 - Provide information on resources in the city, e.g. clothing exchange etc.
 - Use the trust the parent has in the teacher to connect parent with afterschool options
 - Teacher should know about afterschool scholarships and transportation

- Make sure to inform yourself about what's going on at home
 - There's power in checking in with someone so keep digging to get the whole story
 - Give families some pre-reading information to find out if they need help with literacy
 - Ask others in the neighborhood what is going on
 - At intake, ask what is happening in the family and emphasize confidentiality
 - Trust must be established
 - Show a level of concern/compassion
 - Find out how to help on a long term basis
 - Address the parent's reality – "What time would be convenient for you to meet?"
 - There needs to be warmth
 - Less answers, more questions
 - Do a detailed intake
 - A "back-to-school" flier should explain what that means because parents don't necessarily know the terms being used
 - Validate what parents are doing
- Training and support for those reaching and engaging with families
 - Train staff to be proactive in helping parents understand norms of the school
 - Train staff on how children are often affected by certain specific situations at home
 - Go to one's supervisor if the problem is too much to handle
 - Outreach workers need peer support
- Things to think about
 - Recognize that the parent might need support too
 - Know when to push a little. You can do this if you already have a relationship
 - Be aware that parents might want to keep things private.
 - Be aware of our assumptions and try not to jump to conclusions
 - Be fearless
 - Always assume that families have good intentions
 - Stay positive – frame the conversation around ways to make it better
 - Need to take a non-judgmental approach
 - Think of the needs of the parent rather than the needs of the program
 - Make sure program is affordable for families

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT FROM THE YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

2012-13 YIS MEMBERS

Family engagement can be improved in any number of ways. It all starts with the realization of children and families that education is the foundation of success in this world today, and without education ones options are significantly diminished. Every student comes into the Cambridge Public Schools at roughly the same age. However, each student may come from a completely different background than that of the child sitting next to him or her. In all scenarios, each child should have as much opportunity as the next. But how do we build a flawless system for engaging families who are hard to reach out to? It's hard and not something that just happens over night.

What Family Engagement is to us:

- A support system
 - Includes not being judgmental
 - Having someone know what you are doing and supports you
- An encouraging voice
- Families having active communication with student/child
 - So they know what is going on in student's life
 - So that students and families can be on the same page
- Families being involved in students' life
- Families helping to plan out their student's future(tomorrow, months from now, years from now)

Why Family Engagement is important:

- Makes it easier for students to succeed (be the best that they can be)
- Helps students transition from different stages in life
- Helps equalize the starting point
 - Family engagement increases parent and community involvement and can increase their encouragement to challenge students academically, and can address the achievement gap
- Helps parents understand the needs and responsibilities of their children
 - ex. Knowing when one's child needs help
- Helps with motivation and focus

- For students: it helps to emphasize the importance of education
- For parents: it helps improve parental involvement

YIS top recommendations for adults:

- Email/contact parents strategically so they know about groups and ways to be notified of more information, but not bombarded with unnecessary information
 - ex. Informing parents about the college process
- Help with language translation for families whose first language is not English
- Reach out to families rather than waiting for parents to come to you
- Provide financial aid/support for families that need it
- Stress the importance of extracurricular activities/ programs in and out of the community for families
- Review websites so that it is easier to navigate for families and provides tips/resources for parents
- Understanding the different stages of parent involvement
 - ex. Help families, as well as children, transition from elementary to middle school, then to high school

Other recommendations for schools

- Have teachers create Facebook and social media homework groups
- Include software/computer games that are educational
- Educate parents about digital media
- Create parent forums for each middle school
- Have flexibility in parent-teacher conferences
 - To ensure that parents come
 - Provide other face to face meetings with parents so they can see class work, projects, etc.
- Keep parents aware
 - Important info such as:
 - Tutoring options
 - College Process
 - Community activities
- Make transportation available to parents without cars
- Provide computer labs
- Work together to identify and solve issues
- Offer classes/programs for parents about college process and other ways to help their kids

Communities should be involved and can fill in some of the gaps

Families:

- Help with homework
- Provide a quiet space for homework and checking in on it
 - Preferably away from other siblings
- Have a relationship/communication between parent and child
 - Important to
 - Ask questions
 - Be encouraging
 - Listen

- Important to talk about:
 - What student is learning at school
 - Discuss goals and how to achieve them
- Show concern/care for child's ideas and feelings
 - "Reminding your child that you are behind them 100% of the time"
- Attend parent-teacher conferences
- Set aside time for parent and child balanced with child's time with friends
- Know when to be a "parent" and when to be a "friend"
 - Know the balance of being too-engaged and under-engaged (balance of independence and motivation)