

**Cambridge Kids' Council Meeting: February 17, 2011
Cambridge City Hall Annex, 344 Broadway**

Present: Mayor David Maher (chair), Jeff Young, Louis DePasquale, Bob Haas, Sam Seidel, Neal Michaels, Jessica Daniels, Betty Bardige, Cheyenne Jones, Pasang Lhamo, Sally Benbasset, Andrea Collymore, Nancy Tauber, Tina Alu, Charlotte Avant, Ellen Semonoff, Mary Wong

Absent: Susan Flannery, Dennis Keefe, Barbara Kibler, Robel Phillipos, Kenneth Reeves, Humbi Song, Steve Swanger

Guests: Youth Involvement Subcommittee (YIS), Bridget Rodriguez, Victoria Harris, Allentza Michel, Daniel Ruben

A. Call to Order

Mayor Maher calls the meeting to order at 6:10 pm.

Mayor Maher asks those present to introduce themselves, which they, then, do.

B. Update on Middle School Planning Process

Innovation Agenda

Mayor Maher informs the council that Dr. Jeffrey Young, Superintendent of Cambridge Public Schools, is present to discuss The Innovation Agenda which has been presented to the School Committee. He notes the Superintendent has scheduled 17 public meetings regarding this effort, including one tonight, so he'll have to leave at 6:40 pm.

Jeff Young presents the following:

It's good to see so many students here. Many of the students were at the meeting a few weeks ago at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, and a lot came out of that meeting to drive and confirm the direction in which we are heading. In its biggest sense, we are trying to combine our two big, enduring core values: academic excellence and social justice. I've been working on this actively for 18 months; I'm told this process has been taking place over the course of decades. We now have a plan.

When we say "academic excellence", we mean every child graduating from grade eight being fully prepared to access, enjoy, and grow from the opportunities at CRLS. We want each child to learn from a rigorous and exciting curriculum, taught by a teacher who's certified in his subject area and is aware of the needs of middle-schoolers, and that is based on results. One measure we have is the MCAS, and of course we want to see scores increase and the achievement gap decrease. We also want to see kids succeed in high school, in college, and in life.

When we say "social justice", we mean that we want this for everybody. We don't have that today. What we know about the achievement gap in Cambridge is that our achievement gap mirrors the achievement gaps in Massachusetts and in the United States with a few exceptions. If you were looking at a line graph of test scores over time, you would see Caucasian and Asian students in a flat line near the top. Then there's a big gap, and then the lines for students of color, students of low income, students who don't speak English as their

first language, and students with special needs. Everyone I talk to says these gaps are unacceptable, and it's our job to do something about that. That's social justice. When I talk about social justice, I don't mean only that the curriculum teaches it, as great as that is. I mean ensuring that no subgroup of our students is diminished in its ability to achieve. We believe any child is capable of doing outstanding work. It's our responsibility to ensure that they do. The plan is to marry these two goals.

As Jeff passes around a publication of the plan, Mary Wong informs the Council that it is available online, and it has already been sent to members of the Council.

Jeff continues:

We're not going to read the whole thing right now. I would call your attention to the first section, on page one. There are six big goals. The first is to provide all students with a superior academic experience that will give them the knowledge and skills they will need, particularly 21st-century skills. Employers and universities have put effort into figuring out what the next generation of workers needs. The skills are collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creative thinking. The second is to prepare students for high school. Right now our schools prepare students very differently from each other. We don't want to create lemmings, but we do want to implement some standards. The third is around special needs. Currently, those most at-risk need to bounce around from school to school over time to have their needs met. We're committed to requiring no more transitions of these students than of any other students. The fourth is collaboration among the staff. There's an expert on 21st-century skills with whom I was speaking yesterday. He says that in Finland, teachers spend 40% of their professional lives collaborating with their colleagues. In Cambridge, that figure is 1%. Teaching is already an isolating profession, and the current structures in Cambridge exacerbate that. The fifth is physical facilities. I'm glad the Mayor and the City Manager have worked on this. We've been thinking through how to support significant capital improvements. We want to make sure our facilities advance our goals and don't impede them. The sixth is not necessarily to cut the budget, but to maximize the resources we do have. This is an incredible community, with passionate residents and a strong, positive presence from universities, businesses, non-profits, and city services.

The plan is to create four upper school campuses throughout the City, with 250 students in each. Each would have a curriculum which is consistent and rigorous but not identical. We would allow each campus to deliver the program in the ways which are best for the learners there, but with some uniform standards. For grades six through eight, we want to provide a more rigorous, consistent, challenging experience, providing strong instructional core knowledge and more opportunities to grow and find themselves. That's what we're trying to bring together on each campus: solid core instruction and individualized electives.

Mayor Maher asks Jeff to talk about the wraparound.

Jeff obliges:

We're very excited about the idea of a wraparound. We are focused on intervention in Area IV and with Fletcher-Maynard Academy. We want to model a program in a smaller way based on the Harlem Children's Zone. In the Harlem Children's Zone, Geoffrey Canada has found a way to bring together all kinds of school and city services to make sure children and families have the knowledge and resources they need to remain in school. The achievement gap begins early, so we're working, with Fletcher-Maynard's principal, Robin Harris, with

Bob Haas and the Police Department, Claude Jacob and the Public Health Department, and Ellen Semonoff and the Human Services Department to create integrated services to get kids in Area IV off on the right foot.

Bridget Rodriguez directs the Council to page 9 of the report, which discusses this wraparound initiative.

Jeff asks if there are any questions.

Michael McKeown wonders about the availability of choices given the new middle schools. He wonders if there could be some hybrid system in which some community schools remain K-8.

Jeff responds that the choice to be made is made in Kindergarten or before. It is important, he notes, to let parents know that entering Elementary School A puts their child on a path toward Middle School B. He recalls discussion of a hybrid plan, and shares the widely-held view that the surest way to ensure social justice was to apply the middle school plan uniformly. He emphasizes that curriculum will not be dictated out of his office, but stresses the need for a little more centralization.

Nancy Tauber adds that because all the students from a given elementary school will then move to a given middle school, transitions will be easier than some are perhaps envisioning.

Jeff repeats this point, and adds that, under the new plan, students will have the opportunity both to maintain their current friendships and to forge new ones upon entering middle school. He also points out that by combining three times as many students in each middle school, there will be an increased likelihood of many students sharing interests. To illustrate this, he shares the story of a student who plays trumpet: At her school, she was the band, as in her small cohort there was no one else interested in brass instruments.

Cheyenne Jones seeks to confirm that there will only be K-5 and 6-8 schools, and no K-8 schools. Jeff confirms, and adds that three K-5s will meet up to form a 6-8.

Mayor Maher adds that the 6-8 schools will be located on the campuses of K-5 schools.

Cheyenne asks about teacher layoffs.

Jeff responds with his expectation that natural attrition will take care of much of the change. He adds that higher standards will be implemented, including the need to be an expert in one's subject area. He shares of a teacher who was required to teach both social studies and English. As this teacher's background was in English, not much social studies got taught.

Betty Bardige wonders if the curriculum will be adjusted to emphasize social justice and opportunities for giving back to the community.

Jeff thanks Betty for her question, and responds that next year, there will be groups convening over the next year to flesh out curriculum plans in time for September 2012.

A student wonders about the opportunities for collaboration among teachers from upper schools and their associated lower schools.

Jeff notes that there has recently been an effort to build collaboration among teachers of grade eight and teachers of grade nine for the purpose of easing the transition from one school to another, and that the challenge will be taking this model to the middle-school level.

Eitan Stern-Robins wonders about the timeframe of this change, and whether it will happen simultaneously at all schools.

Jeff responds that the plan is to be operating all the middle schools simultaneously in September 2012. He hopes, if the School Committee votes to proceed with this plan, to begin the next day the process of preparing the system for these changes.

Mayor Maher shares some of the discussion from the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Council, specifically about outreach to communities of color.

Jeff chimes in that he hopes the Council can be helpful in this outreach.

Mayor Maher expresses his concern that so much more needs to be done on this front. He shares that he will be meeting with the NAACP soon to discuss this. He also recalls a meeting a few nights prior, with 150 attendees, 72 of whom who stepped up to the microphone to speak. Despite 60% of CPSD being students of color, less than 10% of those who spoke at the meeting were from families of color, he laments. He also notes that the representation of families of color is better with the Council and with meetings of concerned students at CRLS than it is with meetings with the general public. He hopes the Council keeps this in mind, as he doesn't want a few vocal people making decisions for everyone.

Sam Seidel asks about the impact that creating the grades 6-8 schools would have on junior kindergarten through grade 5.

Jeff expresses the awareness of those involved that school doesn't begin in grade 6. He also expresses his belief that for the younger grades, the elementary schools have many good building blocks. Along other recent initiatives, he highlights training in "RTI", response to intervention, which focuses on tiered levels of support for students who are struggling within the general education population that are less severe than removing them to the special education population.

Sam wonders how the conversation would change, and what would have to shift in the mindset of those involved, if and when the School Committee were to approve the agenda.

Jeff expresses his feeling of the need for the mindset to shift from what it has been for 40 years, which is discussing possible changes, to an action-based mindset of implementing change. He agrees this would be a huge shift in mindset. He expresses his regret that he has to leave the meeting.

Mayor Maher thanks Jeff, and informs the Council that the meeting will proceed in a different order than that on the agenda, as he has to leave soon, as well. He also adds that, since Kenneth Reeves is not present, Neil Michaels will be taking the chair upon his departure. He asks the Council to move to approval of the previous minutes.

E. Review / Adoption of Minutes

January 20, 2011

Mary Wong asks for a motion regarding the minutes from the Council's meeting of 20 January.

Action Taken: Neal Michaels moves the adoption of the minutes from the Kids' Council meeting of 18 November 2010. Betty Bardige seconds this motion. The motion passes without opposition. The minutes from the meeting of 20 January 2011 are adopted.

Mayor Maher suggests the Council move to the discussion of the budget.

G. Kids' Council FY2012 Budget

Mary Wong shares that Louis DePasquale, who is representing the City Manager for this budget discussion, needs to leave at 7:30 pm. She explains the basic layout of the budget. It's important, she says, for the Council to ask its questions now. She asks Louis for the timeline regarding the budget.

Louis DePasquale responds that the budget is set to go to the City Council on April 25th, there will be a hearing with the City Manager on the budget for the Human Services Department next week, and any changes would have to happen soon. Whatever is accomplished tonight, he says, would be very helpful.

Mary looks to Budget Goal number one, which is completing the status report. She states that it is a major piece of the Strategic Plan. She shares that identifying the measures for the report has taken longer than expected, which is why there is more money that needs to be allocated for FY2012, which, she reminds the Council, begins on July 1, 2011.

Sally Benbasset wonders, regarding the status report, how much of it will be done by the Council and how much by the City.

Mary responds that the data will be drawn from the City's various sources, but the Council will have to identify the measures which exist and determine if the data say what it looks the data say. She adds that she has recently been in contact with Julie Wilson of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, who had been helping the Council in the past with this project but who had been unable to assist the Council in the past semester.

Neal Michaels is now chairing the Council, at 6:58 pm.

Neal Michaels worries that the budget will need to be approved by a vote of the Council, as the Council may soon lose its quorum. He seeks to confirm that the budget needs to be approved by the next meeting of the Council.

Louis responds with the importance of doing as much as possible at this meeting.

Mary continues on the status report, reiterating the need to meet with department heads and their statisticians to learn what data exists, and then, from there, to establish a framework for the status report.

Neal assumes the Council's goal is to look at the budget goals and approve the budget, if it makes sense. For this, he asks Mary to quickly walk through the budget goals.

Mary continues:

The second budget goal is continuing the partnership between the Council and universities. I want the Council to think about how we would replace our partnership with the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS), if necessary. The third goal is the year-end evaluation. Geoff Marietta was able to help us with this last year, but he may not be able to help us this year.

Louis, noticing the third budget goal's performance measure is 0% for FY2011, wonders if this is accurate and has anything been done for this goal this year.

Mary states that 0% is accurate since the Kids' Council has not completed a self-evaluation for this year.

Neal responds that Geoff was helpful in compiling the evaluation results [for last year].

Betty Bardige figures Geoff shouldn't be necessary to this process. She suggests the Council can fill out evaluation forms and have Mary compile the data contained therein.

Mary responds that Geoff has been helpful in figuring out how to act on the initial evaluation results. She states there is a tool but questions the sensibility of doing evaluations without acting on its results.

Neal Michaels reminds the Council that it will need to look at goals and at funding, and will need to vote while there is still a quorum.

Sam Seidel, noticing an increase in funding for FY2012 from FY2011 in "Total Literacy", wonders why the substantial increase.

Ellen Semonoff responds that the person who has this job has a family health plan, whereas the previous year (FY2011) the person had an individual plan. This person is now working full time on this project and her health plan is now coming out of this department instead of another.

Neal Michaels asks if there are any other questions on the budget goals. He mentions goal number four: Youth Involvement.

Mary states that most of this relates to the budget for the Youth Involvement Subcommittee.

Ellen asks if there are currently more than the 16 members of YIS counted in the budget narrative, as she thought there were.

Mary responds that 16 refers to those members of YIS who receive a stipend supported by City funding. She adds that the year began with 22 members of YIS, and it has since dropped to 19 through attrition. The youth feel 16 is the right number for stipended members given the budget amount.

Neal Michaels asks if there are any other questions on Goal Four, and, seeing none, directs the Council to Goal Five, which is the Literacy Initiative.

Mary states that she does not have the numbers for the performance measures for this section of the budget, and wonders if Ellen has anything to say on the matter.

Ellen responds that those numbers are currently being produced, but she is available to answer any questions.

Neal Michaels asks if those numbers will be filled in before the budget hearing for the Human Services Department, and Ellen responds affirmatively.

Mary directs the Council to the budget charts on funding for the Kids' Council and its initiatives.

Neal Michaels states that Mary will explain some of the terms on this document.

Mary explains:

For Kids' Council operations: "S+W" is salary and wages, which is, essentially, my salary. "OOM" is other operations and maintenance for supplies, materials, etc. "T+T" is travel and training. T+T covers conferences, which I did not attend any for this year. Under YIS, S+W covers Allentza Michel's pay, who works as part-time coordinator with YIS. Here, OOM includes the stipend for the 16 youth members and other supplies and materials. T+T in this section is mainly for the cost of 10 ten youth delegates to attend the annual conference of the National League of Cities. As for Center for Families, part of their funding comes through us.

Betty asks if the budget goals for the Center for Families appear elsewhere in the City's budget.

Mary responds that she has been told by the fiscal office they were not yet ready to provide those numbers. She adds there is a pot of money that exists, because the City has partially replaced federal funding that was lost when the Early Learning Opportunities Act grant ran out. That grant was secured by the 0-8 Council for two years.

Neal Michaels adds there are other goals listed. After Literacy Initiative, he notes, there is a Goal Six, relating to Out-of-School Time, and a Goal Seven, relating to King Open Extended Day.

Mary responds that the amounts on the budget chart for those programs are the portion paid for by the City. As for the Center for Families, its major funding source is still by a grant from the Commonwealth since 1995.

Neal Michaels summarizes for the Council, stating that what was here was a narrative of activities and a funding document relating to them.

Louis adds that the City Manager set guidelines, and that this budget is within those guidelines, and therefore the Council should move forward with this budget.

Neal Michaels adds that there is no significant difference from FY2011.

Michael McKeown asks if it would be possible to add money to OOM for the purpose of doing more outreach with the community to spread awareness of the Kids' Council.

Ellen responds that within each category, the YIS has control over its spending. She adds that, for OOM, the main cost is food.

Ellen suggests that if the YIS had a program for which they needed more funding, there could be ways to find that elsewhere in the budget, but that the Council was not in a position to ask for more money overall.

Mary clarifies that Michael's comment is directed at the OOM for Kids' Council operations and not for YIS.

Charlotte Avant asks if there is any documentation to support the request for \$6300 for OOM for the Council.

Mary responds that that money covers food, materials, and supplies, and she can later provide a specific breakdown.

Cheyenne Jones wonders how the changes from FY2011 to FY2012 were calculated.

Neal Michaels reiterates Louis's point that the City Manager gave guidelines to each department, and then, based on those guidelines, Mary and Ellen, along with the City Manager, discuss what changes need to be made from previous years.

Mary adds that the only major change was to S+W, which was mostly due to increases in the Cost of Living Index, and the health insurance issue Ellen had mentioned.

Sally asks if there is ever a discussion of changing priorities [in the budget], and when that could be discussed.

Mary states that there could be a discussion about this.

Neal adds that, ideally, the self-assessment is the main tool used in such a discussion.

Mary continues that the best time to begin looking at major adjustments to the budget would be November, as that's when the City begins its process for budget allocation.

Louis emphasizes that there are always opportunities to change how money is allocated over the course of the year, if necessary.

Neal Michaels indicates he would entertain a motion on approval of the budget.

Action Taken: Louis DePasquale motions to adopt the Kids' Council FY2012 Budget Goals and Performance Measures and Funding for its operations and initiatives. Sally Benbasset seconds the motion. The motion carries by voice vote.

Neal Michaels directs the Council to its Strategic Plan.

F. Implementation of Strategic Plan

Mary Wong states the following:

I gave an update a while ago, but there are some new members, and it's important to make sure there is a connection between the Council and its subcommittees. There is some concern that we are able to remain focused on our strategic plan and moving it forward. We have done a number of community meetings, with Tina Alu, with Barbara Kibler; feedback has been great. To keep the community engaged, we need to publish our status report. We need a way to fold in the feedback we receive in order to reflect, respect, and recognize the community.

Sally Benbasset adds that getting people to appear at a meeting is not the end goal of community involvement, but that it is important to take what they say seriously and to use it to make decisions.

Tina Alu wonders how a published scorecard could be used to reach people in the community. She worries that, without opportunities for everyone to participate, the Council's effort will be wasted.

Mary adds that without continued engagement, there is mistrust. What's necessary, she says, is a continued relationship. Otherwise those you are serving will see that you only stop by when you need something from them.

Betty Bardige shares that in both the Literacy Initiative and the Out-of-School Time Initiative there are ongoing processes for engaging the community. In the Literacy Initiative, for example, there are literacy ambassadors. She also hands out, on behalf of City Councillor Marjorie Decker and School Committee member Marc McGovern, a report on a blue-ribbon commission they had chaired regarding early childhood development.

Neal Michaels thanks Betty and asks for other thoughts on the matter.

Mary shares that a meeting is planned with the various department heads and with the executive committee to talk about the next steps on the status report.

Neal Michaels directs the Council to Updates and Announcements.

D. Updates and Announcements

Tina Alu shares that the Cambridge Economic Opportunity Commission's (CEOC) block grant has been cut by 50%, so their funding will end on March 30. She asks people to take a flyer and build community support for CEOC.

Neal Michaels, after asking for other announcements, indicates he would entertain a motion to adjourn the Council.

Action taken: Ellen Semonoff moves the adjournment of the Kids' Council. Tina Alu seconds the motion. The motion carries without opposition.

The Council is adjourned at 7:30pm.

Meeting Documents: 1) February 17, 2011 Kids' Council meeting agenda; 2) minutes of the Kids' Council meeting on January 20, 2011; 3) The Innovation Agenda: A Design for Excellence in The Cambridge Public Schools (February 1, 2011); 4) Cambridge Kids' Council Strategic Plan: pages 7 and 9 of plan; 5) Cambridge Kids' Council Strategic Plan: Process and Timeline - Implementation Progress To Date (July 2009 to February 2011); 6) Kids' Council FY2012 Budget Narrative, Goals & Performance Measures (draft: 2/17/11); 7) FY2012 Kids' Council City Funds Chart of Its Operations and Initiatives; 8) CEOC flyer on Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) cuts; and 9) Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Development.