

**Cambridge Kids' Council Meeting: March 24, 2011 at 6-8PM
Cambridge City Hall Annex, 344 Broadway, Cambridge, MA**

Present: Mayor David Maher (chair), Kenneth E. Reeves, Susan Flannery, Jeff Young, Pasang Lhamo, Betty Bardige, Ellen Semonoff, Jessica Daniels, Barbara Kibler, Sally Benbasset, Steve Swanger, Robert Haas, Neal Michaels, Tina Alu, Samuel Seidel, Andrea Collymore, Mary Wong

Absent: Louis DePasquale, Nancy Tauber, Cheyenne Jones, Dennis Keefe, Charlotte Avant, Robel Phillipos, Humbi Song

Guests: Youth Involvement Subcommittee (YIS), Claude Jacob, Bridget Rodriguez, Carolyn Turk, Chris Saheed, Daniel Ruben, John Clifford, Khalil Flemming, Allentza Michel, Lorna Peterson

A. Call to Order

Mayor Maher calls the Council to order at 6:14 p.m.

Mayor Maher invites all present to introduce themselves, which they do.

B. Review / Adoption of Minutes

Mary Wong asks for a motion regarding the minutes from the previous meeting of the Council.

Action Taken: Neal Michaels moves the adoption of the minutes from the 17 February meeting of the Kids' Council. Steve Swanger seconds the motion. The motion passes by voice vote. The minutes from the 17 February meeting of the Kids' Council are adopted.

C. Public Commentary

Mayor Maher seeks commentary from the gathered public, and finds none.

D. Updates & Announcements

Mayor Maher shares that he has good news and bad news. His good news is that the Innovation Agenda has been approved by the School Committee by a vote of 6 to 1. He asks if Carolyn Turk or Jeff Young would care to elaborate.

Jeff Young, Superintendent of Schools, adds that he today has sent a letter to the teachers asking them to apply for the pre-planning phase. There is also, he says, a meeting of the All City School Council next week.

Mayor Maher reminds the Council that the scheduled implementation date of the Innovation Agenda is September 2012, which gives the City 18 months of planning which shall begin quickly.

Mayor Maher continues with his two pieces of bad news. The first is that Chris Saheed, Principal of Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, will be retiring at the end of the year. *The Council applauds Chris Saheed, who is in attendance.* The second is that Bridget Rodriguez, his Education Liaison, will be leaving that office to take a posting as Director of Planning and Collaboration at the Massachusetts Department of Education.

Mayor Maher asks the Council for more announcements, and hears none.

E. Youth Involvement Subcommittee (YIS)

Mayor Maher asks who will be presenting first, to which Abuchi Agu responds. Mayor Maher then asks if this will be Abuchi's last meeting. Abuchi responds that it is his last year on the Council.

1. 2009 -- 2011 Projects

"Student Achievement Disparity at CRLS"

Abuchi Agu begins his group's presentation on the Student Achievement Disparity Report:

In 2009, we decided to look into the minority achievement gap in Honors and Advanced Placement courses. From approximately 500 surveys collected, we focused on a group of 40 students, 20 of them 10th and 11th grade black males and 20 of them 10th and 11th grade white males, whether they perceived disparities among various things. We have not yet had the time to tally all 500 surveys. We began with a school-wide survey through homerooms, and were concerned by three findings in particular. They were that twice as many black students as white students take "College Prep"-level classes, that twice as many black students as white students do not plan to take AP-level classes, and that black students felt three times less likely to be encouraged to higher-level courses by guidance counselors than white students did. We also discussed a few possible remedies. One is to increase the rigor of College Prep courses or to encourage more students to take AP or Honors courses. Another is to provide peer advising and mentorship for students of color, particularly with younger students. Another is to issue a publication demonstrating the importance of high-level courses. Another is to hold a forum discussing the importance both of attending college and of enrolling in high-level courses, as there are some misconceptions of the value of both of these choices. Another is to change the name of College Prep courses, as there are many stigmas associated with that name.

Abuchi asks that questions wait.

Mary Wong repeats this request, noting that it would be best to get through the next presentation that questions may be asked about both while Chris Saheed and Jeff Young, Superintendent of Cambridge Schools, are still present since both reports relate to CRLS.

"Respect for Cultural Diversity & Practices at CRLS"

Ramsey Beckett begins speaking about this project's report:

At our YIS retreat, we discussed how people felt. One of us shared that he didn't think he felt as comfortable at CRLS as he suspected other students felt because he is a practicing Muslim. This led us to ask just how comfortable different students felt at CRLS. In April 2010, we designed and distributed a survey, with the help of some faculty and some graduate students from MIT. From the 230 responses, we discovered a few things. Among those surveyed, 73% spoke English as their first language. We found that comfort at CRLS did not correlate with race or with course level. Most students agreed that culture is important to them. The majority express their culture the same at home and at school. Most students feel genuinely respected. Most still want a greater focus on multicultural society. Asked what culture meant, there were a variety of responses. Our recommendations are to make more events which focus on diversity and celebrate different cultures and to use fashion, art, promotions, and exhibits to make students' culture a more pervasive

element of the CRLS atmosphere. It is important to the students that we celebrate diversity.

Mayor Maher thanks Abuchi and Ramsey for their presentations, and asks the Council if they have any questions.

Mayor Maher begins with one of his own: he wonders if there has been any thought to an alternative name for College Prep courses. Abuchi says no.

Ken Reeves wonders why the focus groups were composed of males, and suggests it was an effort to “compare apples to apples”. Abuchi responds that the group’s sense going into the project was that the disparities among races regarding course level were more prevalent among males than among females.

Mayor Maher asks if the twenty students of both races were chosen randomly. Abuchi says yes.

Steven Swanger wonders if these attitudes regarding College Prep courses have been around for awhile. Abuchi mentions that it is something he’s noticed in the past.

John Clifford seeks to clarify that three-fourths of the guidance counselors didn’t push minority students to higher-level classes. Abuchi does clarify, stating that twice as many black students as white students felt they weren’t being pushed to these courses.

Chris Saheed shares his thoughts:

Your work is incredible, and shows why CRLS is such a wonderful school. These issues are at a point at which the adults cannot solve the problems alone. It’s exciting to have students who also care about these issues. In February, we had a series of panels discussing these issues. There was also a group of students who produced a video interviewing students of color taking high-level courses asking them about their experiences and motivations. These kinds of things allow us to begin seeing a more complete picture of these issues.

As to College Prep courses, we’ve been working for the last five years on increasing the rigor of these courses. There are many perceptions we have to fight against regarding the quality of education that can be received in these courses. One success we have had is in ninth grade physics, for which the teachers have figured out how to teach the class on multiple levels simultaneously, thereby allowing students of differing abilities to learn together. This is a model we want to expand, but it’s not an easy road. We have a few other programs which are developing similarly, including ninth grade English and Spanish. I will say that while these efforts are helpful, they still aren’t leading to a more-diverse pool of students taking higher-level courses in the future.

Barbara Kibler expresses her support for holding forums with students about the importance of college. She wonders if similar programs could be developed for parents. Abuchi agrees that this could be valuable.

Claude Jacob shares a few thoughts. It’s the first he’s heard of a stigma surrounding courses labeled “College Prep”, a dynamic he finds fascinating. He is curious as to how the 40 students in the focus group were chosen from among the 500 survey respondents. He wonders what role parents have in choosing AP or College Prep courses, and what differences might exist in this parental involvement among parents who are first-generation Americans. He also wonders, in addition to the number of students who plan to attend college, which was part of the slide presentation, how many of them think they’ll be ready for college.

Abuchi responds to two of these points, noting that it was his sister's influence which led to his taking of AP classes, and that a larger sample size could, of course, provide more expansive results.

Ellen Semonoff asks whether the peer advising Abuchi had expressed interest in pursuing could also be done for eighth graders, and not just for ninth graders. Abuchi says his group was looking at both of those possibilities, though they are unsure of the logistics of coordinating CRLS students with middle school students.

Ellen then recalls the YIS being involved in a project for eighth graders a few years back, and wonders about doing something similar again. Abuchi replies that he had heard of that program, but that it occurred before his time with YIS.

Jeff Young asks some of the students present what steps could have been taken when they were of middle-school age to better prepare them for some of these challenges at CRLS.

Abuchi recalls having more trouble adjusting from one school to another before CRLS, as he transferred from the Tobin School to the Kennedy-Longfellow School. He suggests there should be an effort to make the middle-school curriculum more consistent.

Jeff asks for other responses, and Mayor Maher prods the students present to oblige.

Ramsey wonders whether the Baby U. model of training parents of younger children how they can go about preparing them for kindergarten could work in training parents of older children how they can go about preparing them for college.

Andrea Collymore, speaking from her experience as an immigrant who raised a child through Cambridge schools, advocates for preparing parents for college when their students are as young as fifth grade, as there is a great deal of complexity in the college preparation process which to some is received wisdom and to some is never learned.

Sam Seidel shares a saying he once heard, that "your kids teach you how to be a parent." He also wonders if Ramsey was surprised by the finding that 73% of the students responding to her group's survey speak English as a first language.

Ramsey mentions that most of the students who take ESL classes are separated for other classes, due to the difficulty involved in learning in a foreign language. She states she had not thought much about the percentage of students who speak English as a first language, and was more interested in the fact that the rates of comfortability with culture did not differ between those who speak English as a first language and those who don't.

Jessica Daniels points out that there was just a college preparation program for parents of sophomores and juniors the other night. A few things she noticed at this program were that very few of the parents were people of color, and that everyone who was there seemed overwhelmed by all the information being thrown at them. She likes the idea of beginning spreading this information at a younger age.

A student, currently a junior mentions that she was unaware of the importance of AP classes when she was a freshman. She also didn't learn about the variety of college entrance exams until fairly recently. She feels as though her junior year and senior year can have been easier had she known to plan better ahead of time.

Claude is curious about the 73% figure (of students who speak English as a first language) and

seeks to confirm that this was from self-reported data. Ramsey confirms that the data came from 230 surveyed students. She also shares that her group additionally studied focus groups of YIS and of students in ESL classes.

Claude reminds the Council that there was, therefore, the possibility of reporting bias in these numbers.

Claude continues with thoughts on the idea of a “Parent U.”, thinking that it would be important to investigate the roles of various members of the school community, and see how they can all work together to make the college process a little less daunting.

Betty Bardige recalls her high school experience, and remembers that, at first, all the classes were taught at different levels. Sometime around grade 11, she shares, her school began to experiment with unleveled classes. She had found this refreshing and had enjoyed the opportunity to meet new people. She wonders if there are any examples beyond ninth grade physics of classes in the core academic subjects that are taught unleveled.

Chris responds that CRLS experimented with that about a decade ago, but tried to implement it too quickly, and it failed. He suggests that once a clear, delineated curriculum is in place, it would be possible to try this again. He continues to discuss some of the points raised by Ramsey:

We just did a School Climate survey, and the results were mostly positive. The one area in which we consistently saw that students were not getting as much education as they wanted was civic learning situations. On this, we often say we want our students to be respectful, take advantage of opportunities and value diversity. These three things, however, are not a requirement for a diploma. We’ve been working on how to see these three words as skills which can be measured and be accountable, so that we can get a better sense of how we are doing at teaching them, how we can improve, and how our students are absorbing these concepts.

Mayor Maher asks the Council for one more question.

Ken expresses his regret that he, too, must leave early. He shares a few of his thoughts:

First, to the idea of a Baby U. program to help prepare parents for the college process, this is something that Geoff Canada has implemented in Harlem called the Office of College Success, as part of his Harlem Children’s Zone project. We have been working in the Human Services subcommittee of the City Council on doing something similar here. There may be something on the horizon, though I wish we had better buy-in from the School Department on this program.

Also, to Claude’s point about not knowing the ecology of the students surveyed, this is not a new problem. There is a culture of success among the parents of students in AP courses that simply does not exist among other parents. We have yet to figure out how to get all parents to engage with their children’s education. We had been doing poorly on this front, and we are now doing worse.

Ken closes with an attempt to provide constructive criticism on the conduct of the surveys, questioning the statistical validity of results gleaned from a focus group of 40 students out of 500 students surveyed while admitting that he is not, himself, a statistician. Another critique he makes regards Ramsey’s statement that their group surveyed “about 230” students versus exactly. Mary responds the exact amount of surveys collected was “231.” He then points out that when he hears words that suggest a lack of rigor, it makes it more difficult for him to focus on the findings.

Sam expresses the positive impression the YIS’s work had left on him, and also reminds the

Council that effectively including diversity will only become more important in the years to come as the region and the City continue to diversify.

Mayor Maher encourages the Council to applaud the efforts of Abuchi, Ramsey, and their colleagues on YIS, which it does.

"Youth Voting Age"

Okey Agu begins speaking about YIS's Voting Age Project, which seeks to lower the voting age to 17, by noting that the initiative began on a citywide basis in 2005, continuing with a rally and a formal petition in 2006, and a shift to a statewide focus in 2009.

Eitan Stern Robins continues:

We readopted the project at our retreat in October. We split our efforts into research, youth group outreach, and legislator outreach. We've met with many members of the Massachusetts General Court, and have gained the support of State Representatives Cory Atkins, Tim Toomey, Alice Wolf, and Sean Garballey, and of State Senator Salvatore DiDomenico. Rep. Garballey, Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Election Laws, is the lead sponsor of our legislation, H.192. We're also collaborating with youth groups from Boston, Arlington, Lowell, Concord, Somerville, and others in Cambridge, with the goal of holding a rally at the State House on April 21 to raise publicity and strengthen support for our bill.

Claude asks how many other states are looking at this. One student responds that a variety of countries have already done this, including New Zealand and Austria. Eitan mentions a concurrent attempt to lower the national voting age.

Tina Alu wonders about the response from elected officials. Eitan responds that some have been more keen on the idea than others.

Tina asks if those who were opposed had mentioned why this was so. Eitan responds that the main concern was the need to draw a line somewhere, even if finding precisely where might seem arbitrary.

Michael McKeown adds that in the research they've studied, they've found that there's very little difference between the brains of 18 year olds and the brains of 17 year olds. He also shares a few lawmakers' concerns, specifically that even if youth were given the right to vote, they wouldn't vote, and they wouldn't be able to understand the issues. YIS's research, he notes, says otherwise.

Carolyn Turk wonders about broader engagement in the election process, such as campaigns, forums, and other non-voting activity. Eitan responds that the focus of this project has been specifically the voting age, but that YIS is constantly engaged in efforts to increase youth engagement with the community.

Jessica recommends another possible benefit, in that many kids leave their home area before their first election, so there could be value in making voting a habit before they leave. Eitan shares that this is something YIS has brought up in its advocacy.

Mayor Maher recalls that when the issue was first raised, as a Cambridge-only initiative, he was not convinced. He was, he says, among those suggesting that the voting age fight should be taken to the State House. He applauds YIS for doing so and for their continued perseverance.

Michael adds that many public officials had expressed an interest in keeping election laws consistent across the state, whereas some had expressed an interest in seeing what each city wanted first before taking state action. Mayor Maher suggests that this last response is called "Passing the Buck."

Mary adds that Governor Patrick supports giving 17 year olds the right to vote.

Steve expresses his support for the proposal to be considered. Betty asks how the Council can help with this effort.

Michael enthusiastically suggests that she, and the Council, attend the rally. Eitan seconds Michael's sentiment. Another student recommends signing an online petition on YIS's Facebook page.

Eitan mentions that not a lot of people know about the YIS's online petition. Betty asks if a link to it can be emailed to the Council. Eitan affirms.

Mayor Maher congratulates Okey, Eitan, and their colleagues on a good job.
The Council applauds their efforts.

"MBTA Student Passes"

Pasang Lhamo mentions some of the reasons YIS is interested in changing MBTA policies regarding student passes:

Both the \$20 monthly pass and the student-discounted pay-as-you-go are only valid on weekdays before 11:00pm. We want them to work on weekends, as well. Students don't stop being students on the weekend. Also, extending the passes would increase mobility for the students. We've conducted a survey and have distributed the results to the Council. We surveyed how students make use of public transit and how much they pay on weekends. Our next step is to meet with the Secretary of the MA Department of Transportation.

Mayor Maher adds that he may have a useful connection to Secretary Mullen.

Sam asks what the passes are currently. Pasang responds that there are two programs for which students are eligible: a \$20 monthly pass and a discounted fare when paying per ride.

Mayor Maher wonders how many students at CRLS have these passes. Pasang responds that they have not yet finished tallying the results of their survey.

Sam seeks to clarify that the monthly pass is good for both buses and trains. Pasang confirms, and adds that the problem is that it doesn't work on weekends.

Mayor Maher asks if the passes work during school vacations. Pasang says yes, but that they don't work during summer vacation.

Allentza Michel adds that until 2010, the passes only worked until 8:00pm. She credits student advocacy with effecting the change to 11:00pm.

Mayor Maher tells the Council that he will speak to Mary to get YIS in touch with Secretary Mullen. He thanks Pasang and her colleagues for their good work. *The Council applauds their*

efforts.

2. National League of Cities Conference

Shubham Dhital begins speaking of YIS's trip to the National League of Cities Conference:

On the first day of the Conference, March 13, we met with fellow youth delegates from around the country and got to learn about their lives. We did some sightseeing of the monuments. At the Vietnam Memorial, we met John Clifford, who read us his poems about the Vietnam War, in which he served (video showing John Clifford reciting his poems to the youth delegation). Shubham asks for a round of applause for John Clifford. *The Council applauds.*

Another student continues, mentioning a breakfast with various officials and a speech by First Lady Michelle Obama on her "Let's Move" campaign to combat obesity.

Michael highlights of a lunch with Cambridge elected officials and a meeting with the National Youth Rights Association about the Voting Age Project. He also throws in another invitation for everyone to attend the upcoming rally to support H.192.

Students continue, recalling various speakers they heard and workshops they attended. One mentions a tour they took of U Street, led by Ken Reeves.

Michael then shares the results of a meeting with Congressman Mike Capuano, which was a follow-up to a meeting they had held last year. While Rep. Capuano is still on the fence about the voting age issue, Michael reports, he was glad to see that YIS is more organized and prepared on the issue than they had been last year.

Mayor Maher applauds the efforts of those who presented. He also shares his pride that Cambridge is able to provide this opportunity for youth, and his thanks to Rep. Capuano for meeting with the youth delegates in each of the last few years. He affirms his support for the City's funding of the YIS.

Michael thanks the City for the opportunity to attend the Conference.

Ellen is glad to hear the youth delegates seem to have made the most of the opportunity to attend the Conference, and thanks the chaperones for making it possible.

Sam points out that even though 17-year-olds do not yet have the right to vote, YIS is providing an excellent example of another way to effect change, through its activism.

Michael responds that without the right to vote, it's still possible to ignore 17-year-olds.

Mayor Maher thanks those who participated in this discussion. *The Council applauds.*

Mayor Maher then mentions the Let's Move initiative, which is being led by Dr Howard Koh, an Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services who grew up in Cambridge, and is being spearheaded in Cambridge by Claude. Claude thanks the Mayor and the City for their support of this initiative.

F. Implementation of Strategic Plan

Mayor Maher notes that the Council is running out of time, but still encourages Mary Wong to run

through this section so that the Council can be aware.

Mary provides a quick run-down on the current status of the Council's Strategic Plan:

We held a meeting on March 9 among all the department heads and co-chairs of the Strategic Plan subcommittees. Each subcommittee will, by April 15, decide on five existing pieces of data for the Council to include in its upcoming printed report and two pieces of data we would hope to develop. Julie Wilson, of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, was at that meeting, and I'm glad to have her back in the loop on this process.

Mayor Maher is glad the Council was able to see all the presentations, and he leads the Council in additional applause for the presenters.

G. Next Steps

Next Kids' Council Meeting: May 19 (6:00 -- 8:00pm)

Mayor Maher shares that the next meeting is on May 19. He reminds Bridget Rodriguez that, as she'll be out of work at that point in the evening, she should stop by.

Notetaker's addendum: The meeting has been rescheduled for May 18 at the Citywide Senior Center.

The Council adjourns at 8:02pm.

Meeting Documents: 1) March 24, 2011 Kids' Council meeting agenda; 2) minutes of the Kids' Council meeting on February 17, 2011; 3) 2009 Report on "*Student Achievement Disparity at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School*" by the Youth Involvement Subcommittee; 4) 2010 Report on "*Exploring Respect for Cultural Diversity & Practices at Cambridge Rindge & Latin School*" by the Youth Involvement Subcommittee; 5) MA House Bill H.192, *An Act Relative To Age Requirement In Local Elections*; 6) fact sheet on H.192: *An Act Relative To Age Requirement In Local Elections*; 7) "*Students Work with Massachusetts Legislators to Lower Local Voting Age: State Congressman Sponsor Initiative Led by Cambridge Youth*" by Sofie Karasek, a member of the Youth Involvement Subcommittee; 8) MBTA Survey by the MBTA Project Subgroup of the Youth Involvement Subcommittee; and 9) PowerPoint slides and video on the Youth Involvement Subcommittee's presentation topics.