

**Cambridge Kids' Council Meeting: May 18, 2011 at 6-8PM
Citywide Senior Center, 806 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA**

Present: Mayor David Maher (chair), Ken Reeves, Jessica Daniels, Neal Michaels, Humbi Song, Sam Seidel, Robert Haas, Nancy Tauber, Sally Benbasset, Cheyenne Jones, Betty Bardige, Barbara Kibler, Andrea Collymore, Ellen Semonoff, Charlotte Avant, Mary Wong

Absent: Louis DePasquale, Dennis Keefe, Jeff Young, Tina Alu, Robel Phillipos, Susan Flannery, Pasang Lhamo, Steve Swanger

Guests: Youth Involvement Subcommittee (YIS), John Clifford, Lee Gianetti, Daniel Ruben, Claude Jacob, Allentza Michel, Christina Giacobbe, Melissa Castillo, Carole Sousa, Jen Baily, Michelle Godfrey

A. Call to Order

Mayor Maher calls the Council to order at 6:16pm.

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

B. Review / Adoption of Minutes

Mayor Maher seeks a motion to adopt the minutes from the previous meeting of the Kids' Council.

Action Taken: Ellen Semonoff moves the adoption of the minutes from the meeting of the Kids' Council on March 24, 2011. Barbara Kibler seconds the motion. The motion is passed by unanimous voice vote. The minutes from the Council's meeting of March 24, 2011 are adopted.

C. Public Commentary

Mayor Maher asks if there is any commentary from the public. None.

D. Updates & Announcements

John Clifford invites all present to help in and celebrate with CCTV's moving to a new location.

Mayor Maher asks Cheyenne Jones if she is happy about graduating from CRLS. She is.

Barbara Kibler invites all present to a few upcoming events at the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House, including Sweet Soul Supper. Mayor Maher adds some details on one of these events.

Ken Reeves mentions that many events will be happening on June 18th, including the next graduation of Baby University. Ellen Semonoff points out that Hoops'n'Health is another event happening on that day.

John Clifford adds that the Workforce Development program, Cambridge Works, is also having its graduation soon, on the 16th.

E. Presentation & Discussion: *Engaging Families*

Mayor Maher invites Ellen Semonoff to speak on recent efforts to engage families.

Ellen Semonoff reminds the Council that it has been wondering what tools exist to bring families into broader participation in the community. She shares that the people about to present on this also shared this information with Julie Wilson, of Harvard's Kennedy School, who has been working with the Kids' Council on data for indicators and measures. She asks the presenters to introduce themselves again in the context of their presentation.

Carole Sousa of the Community Learning Center, who coordinates the Department of Human Service Programs (DHSP) and Police Department's Community Engagement Team, discusses how this project aims to reach out to underserved communities in Cambridge:

Each year we review which communities are most in need of outreach. We have seven outreach workers, who work with specific communities which are not making full use of the various resources Cambridge has to offer. The model, which we all believe in, is based on the fact that the families who make up these communities know more about their own communities than we as outside professional staff know. Our outreach workers aim to build leadership capacity within the community—this is our responsibility. We've had to shift our paradigm. Instead of asking questions like "Should we translate the flyers into Haitian Creole?" or "Is radio the best way to reach out to Ethiopians?", we try to answer how best to reach members of these communities to take on the mantle of working in their communities and how best to commit to a slow, intensive outreach effort. As an example of what learning from within a community can achieve, we learned from one of our outreach workers that in many Muslim households, only the father has the authority to approve a home visit. Armed with this knowledge, we've been able to triple the number of home visits we make to Muslim homes. We need to be ready to receive feedback. If a person we're working with doesn't feel comfortable about the relationship, they'll walk away. Can we change how we offer services to respond to the communities we're serving?

Christina Giacobbe of the Police Department continues, speaking about community members, outreach workers, and leaders:

The Agenda for Children Literacy Initiative, the Community Learning Center and the Center for Families all hire parents from different ethnic backgrounds, working part-time to do outreach. They provide the link between our organizations and the communities we're trying to reach. We've found it to be extremely effective; we continue to see new families we hadn't seen before. Among the three DHSP programs, we have 25 outreach workers speaking 12 languages. These people know how to reach out to their own communities and don't face the cultural and linguistic barriers we've confronted in the past. This is preferable to having a stranger come into a community with no connection to anyone in it.

We've also been afforded the opportunity to learn a lot through our supervision, training, and support of these outreach workers. It's been exciting to see how each of them has grown. We're learning, too, about some of the coordination challenges inherent in working with people who both have other jobs and have other commitments within the program. The three of us meet fairly regularly to ensure that all of our outreach workers are able to attend their trainings.

Melissa Castillo of the Cambridge Youth Programs focuses on what information comes back:

We still use the website, listservs, and Twitter, but these efforts only reach some. Our community doesn't read the website, doesn't use Twitter, and isn't following the listserv. So we flyer, we poster; we put notices where we expect people to see them. To reach the Muslim community, we put flyers in the Halal meat market in Boston. To reach the African-American community, we put flyers at

hairdressers and barbershops. We've been learning to think of these kinds of places for posting flyers. We're learning to build relationships with people at the churches, that a notice can get in the next bulletin. We've been speaking with people at the hair salon, that they can pass the word about the time of the next class. We've been out meeting families where they are, instead of waiting for them to come to us. Our outreach workers are holding meetings at other people's homes, so that in a physical way we are going to them and meeting them where they are. We've also been working with the police, to get them to some of these meetings, to help break down myths about the police. The main point is that there's no one thing we can do to reach everyone. This means we have to always be thinking about everyone we want to see around the table, and what efforts we can make to reach out to them.

Carole continues, speaking of leaders from within the community:

Recently the School Department held some meetings; no one came. CRLS had a collaboration with the Community Learning Center in 2007 in which they hired Navigators—people who were tasked with connecting with immigrant families of rising 9th grade students and helping them to navigate the American high-school system. A recommendation which came out of this was that large meetings in English were intimidating. It would be better to have smaller meetings, even in English, and better still to have one-on-one meetings. We know we can't do that, so what can we do? We meet with eight to ten parents, all from the same country, speaking in their language. If we have presenters who don't speak their language, we translate what we can with the outreach workers. To get results, we do a series of meetings, not one-off events. We've also found that many immigrant parents are hesitant to take control, and wait for the teacher to come to them with problems. To help open lines of dialogue, we need to start off by building trust. For this reason we have a series of networking events every year. We've also learned from Melissa and the Youth Centers of the value of using the teenagers to do the outreach to their parents. That's something they're very good at.

Christina Giacobbe comes back to speak to how this all actually happens:

We've been helped along by a commitment to efficient outreach from Ellen Semonoff at DHSP and from Commissioner Bob Haas at the Police Department. Without their leadership, it wouldn't happen. Some officials were skeptical early on, but by building partnerships over time and discussing our shared goals with our partners, we've started to click. Now that we've built the relationships, we can take the initiative ourselves. Police officers and youth workers have started talking about specific kids and how to help them. These conversations wouldn't have happened without us having built up trust in each other.

Melissa has this to add:

The goal, of course, is to connect residents with resources, to go to them, in a proactive way. This takes a lot of organization and coordination with, for example, the Cambridge Housing Authority, Rindge Towers, and others, that they can spread the word that on this night, we'll be going door-to-door. Then the families know we're coming, and we can plan how to efficiently make them aware of our services. We brought in program leaders to think of what the resources were. Then we list ten to fifteen of those resources on a doorhanger. Instead of each program doing its own poster campaign, we could inform the communities of the breadth of options available to them all at once. We then start thinking about staffing—who are we sending to each home? What languages do our different staffers speak? Then, we think of what we do after. A week after each door-to-door effort, we go back to that community for a barbecue or something else providing food. This gives us another chance to inform the community.

Last year we got to 1700 homes. On June 7th, we're hoping to get to 700 homes. By all working together, we make it more efficient, and each program doesn't, on its own, have to reach 1700 homes. We build relationships with the community, we build the capacity of the program leaders, and we nurture relationships between the community and the police. That's a little bit about our door-to-door efforts.

Mayor Maher asks if the School Department has participated in these door-to-door outreach efforts, though he says he knows the answer.

Ellen Semonoff recalls that the family liaison from CRLS was at a resource fair in North Cambridge, though memories conflict as to whether this person was there on behalf of the School Department or not.

Mayor Maher wonders what steps would need to be taken to engage more family liaisons from the schools in this kind of work. Melissa responds that training them would be a good place to start. She also shares that she was the one who had invited the CRLS family liaison to the resource fair. Mayor Maher asks if the family liaison had come with the intent of speaking about a specific program. Melissa responds that the family liaison spoke about upcoming events, and agrees that it would be great to have family liaisons come along for the door-to-door events.

Mayor Maher gets back to the question of training the family liaisons for this kind of work, and asks what that would entail. Carole responds that it would depend on the goals of the School Department, and that the training could be tailored to the goals.

Mayor Maher shares his concern regarding the current School Department restructuring, in that those who are making their opinions known on the matter are not fully representative of the Cambridge community. He wonders how these lessons can be used to help the School Department and the City let everyone know that they can be a part of this process.

Bob Haas emphasizes the importance of using the same people to communicate with the same families, as the only way for any good communication to happen long-term is for there to be strong, long-term relationships. He shares that, as he and others present discussed on a recent train ride, "If we want to do the outreach, we have to do the outreach."

Ellen notes that there are two different and important pieces being discussed. One of these is the door-to-door mass event, for which she thinks the school liaisons are well-suited. The other is the lasting relationships that will, in the long term, foster increased participation.

Neal Michaels sees it as clear that the leadership is committed to making this happen. He is worried, however, about the cohesion in the School Department behind this project. Mayor Maher chimes in to say that this is one of the challenges with such a decentralized system; there are 12 or 13 entities responsible for communication, and sometimes it doesn't happen in a cohesive way, if at all.

Cheyenne Jones shares her experiences working closely with the family liaison at CRLS on reaching out to ESL students. She points out that immigrant parents often are working three or four jobs and simply can't find the time to participate. She thinks the central issue is not one of trust but one of time.

Christina Giacobbe agrees with Cheyenne's point, and expands on it to suggest that a move needs to be made away from a crisis-intervention model and toward a more-ongoing, preventative model. One of the big steps in this direction, she thinks, is deciding that such a thing is a priority and then dedicating the proper resources toward it.

Carole agrees that the parent liaisons are a valuable resource in the project of reaching out on the School Department's structural changes, as, among other strengths, they have lists of the families with whom they communicate, but thinks that a more basic start is needed. She knows that immigrant parents are committed to success, also knows that they may not know what that means in the American high school system. As an example, she offers extracurriculars, which can be valuable on a college application, but can be seen by a parent as simply an activity to siphon away time from studies.

Mayor Maher summarizes by saying that work needs to be done in getting the word out. He admits the charter schools are able to communicate effectively, and so it seems to parents as though they are a better option, though he believes they are not.

Ken Reeves thanks the presenters, and appreciates the timeliness of the presentation. To Mayor Maher's point about charter schools, he notes that African-American parents are starting to realize there are options. For spreading the City's view, he suggests making use of the elected officials who have a lot of door-to-door experience and to provide a free meal at the meetings. He finds fault with the notion that anyone who is acting on incomplete information, such as those whom the School Department has not successfully reached, is in fact making a choice.

Ken also suggests that the ordinance regarding the Kids' Council be amended to include a representative of the Cambridge Housing Authority as an official member of the Council. Mary interjects that Steve Swanger is a member of the Kids' Council but could not make it to this meeting. Ken suggests that, as the Housing Authority houses over half of the students of Cambridge schools, they would be a valuable voice to have in any such discussion.

Ken asks, about the doorhangers, how decisions about which programs do and which programs don't wind up listed on the doorhanger are made. Melissa says that emails were sent to all the organizations involved in a given neighborhood, some of them responded, and some of them didn't.

Ken wonders, lastly, what efforts are being made to reach native-born African-Americans, as they are a group that is still quite present in the City but is never well-represented at various meetings and ceremonies. He notes that Prospect Hill Academy and the other charter schools are not having trouble reaching these families.

Jessica Daniels points out that many of the students at Prospect Hill are not from Cambridge. But she admits that one thing they may be doing better than Cambridge is providing individualized attention, and she thinks that college counseling is an area in which CRLS could improve.

John Clifford agrees, sharing his view that some of the college counselors at CRLS do not know what they are doing.

Nancy Tauber takes over as Chair on Mayor Maher's departure.

Claude Jacob thanks the presenters. He wonders if there are any plans to formalize, certify, or credential the outreach workers. Carole responds that the outreach workers who have the time are going to the trainings in Boston. Christina agrees that this could be an area for growth in the program.

Ellen suggests also that work needs to be done on increasing the breadth of the outreach team, but admits that there are limited resources for doing so.

Christina adds to this that the part-time nature of the program makes it difficult to retain talent.

Nancy Tauber, explaining why she is now chairing the meeting, shares that Mayor Maher, Commissioner Haas and others had to go to a Police Auxiliary ceremony.

Barbara Kibler, returning to the issue of charter schools, points out that they come to her and ask about recruiting students.

Charlotte Avant poses a scenario in which a family has just moved into Cambridge, the parent does not speak English very well or speaks it with a heavy accent, and keeps having to call from school to school to school to collect all the information she needs. She wonders if there is some sort of centralized resources for someone in that situation.

Carole responds that in the best case, that parent would be connected with an outreach worker who is a centralized resource of this information. The worst case scenario is what Charlotte just described, of calling many places which just send her on to the next phone number. The schools say they have resources for situations like this, but when we hear from parents, it's that they were not able to find those resources.

A student explains that he is Bengali, and his parents faced many of the issues being discussed, but he lives in Mid-Cambridge, not in Rindge Towers. He asks what might exist to reach out to immigrant families who don't live in dense immigrant areas.

Christina sees his point, and explains that door knocking is one tool, but not the only one. There are other ways, she says, to make sure that culture and language are not a barrier. She agrees that the important point is helping people to realize what the options are.

Carole reiterates that door-knocking is only one of the ways in which this effort engages with families.

Melissa adds that an important role exists for the children themselves, as they are the ones who are in closest contact with their parents.

Claude states his preference for the term "connectors" to describe those involved in the outreach, whether they be outreach workers or hairdressers. He emphasizes the importance of finding a connection to help orient oneself to the system. He also cautions that it's important to recognize that the Community Engagement Team is not going to solve the problem of connecting each person to the resource he needs, but that it is a piece of a larger puzzle.

Nancy Tauber notes that these problems of engagement existed during the School Committee and the School Department's discussion of the Innovation Agenda. Whenever there would be a meeting, she recalls, it would be in a different room but it would be the same people. She thinks the School Department could learn from the Community Engagement Team. She remembers Barbara Kibler talking once about a meeting at the Margaret Fuller House with the Superintendent at which parents felt able to speak up, and she notes that the difference with that meeting was that the community had invited the schools, rather than the schools imposing themselves on the community. She also notes that the School Department should not feel the need to reinvent the wheel, as, clearly, there are models in Cambridge for how to engage with the community. As an aside, she notes that there are roughly 320 charter school students who would otherwise be students of Cambridge.

Ellen Semonoff responds that the Community Engagement Team would be excited to meet with the School Department to share some of what they have learned.

Carole repeats Claude's point that one approach will not work for all families, but agrees it would be worthwhile to share the Community Engagement Team's approach with the School Department.

Sally Benbasset thinks that the timeframe on which the Community Engagement Team is seeking to work, one of building relationships over the course of years, is one which the schools could do a better job of adopting.

Betty Bardige wonders about the possibility of using the first week of school as a time at which various engagement efforts are made. She suggests making some sort of effort at this time for parents and teachers to meet, not to discuss curriculum, but to build a relationship. She suggests that there should be a team thinking about how to better connect parents to teachers.

Nancy Tauber suggests that the creation of four new schools with the Innovation Agenda provides an excellent opportunity to experiment with these sorts of shifts in school culture.

Nancy Tauber notes that the Kids' Council has fallen behind the meeting schedule.

Allentza Michel reiterates what has been said, that effective engagement requires repeated communication with not a program or message in mind, but with a relationship in mind. She also shares an anecdote from her experience about how these types of efforts take many years to be successful, but they can be effective if they are sustained.

Sally shares a side note, that there is a discrepancy among the parent liaisons at the various schools, and there needs to be more effort at consistency with that position.

Nancy Tauber agrees that there are many issues in the school regarding centralization.

F. Implementation of Strategic Plan

Mary shares that each of the five Outcome Subcommittees submitted seven measures with existing data sources as a shortlist for consideration in the Status Report on Children and Families. She has been in contact with Julie Wilson, who has an intern to help comb the data for presentation in September.

G. Next Steps

Mary shares that Mayor Maher wants to meet with all the YIS members who are graduating seniors since this is their last meeting of the Kids' Council. Mary will be in contact with the students to arrange for this meeting.

The Executive Committee of the Kids' Council is to meet on June 1st, and the full Council is to meet on September 15th at 6:00pm.

The Council adjourns at 7:55pm.

Meeting Documents: 1) May 18, 2011 Kids' Council meeting agenda; 2) minutes of the Kids' Council meeting on March 24, 2011; 3) postcard invitation to "A Sweet Soul Supper"; 4) PowerPoint slides on the Community Engagement Team's presentation titled, "Engaging Families"; and 5) a doorhanger listing: "North Cambridge Resources" and "School Year & Summer Resources."