

**Cambridge Council on Children, Youth and Families
Minutes from the Meeting of 19 January 2012**

at City Hall Annex, 344 Broadway, Cambridge from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm

Present: Ken Reeves (chair), Neil Michaels, Barbara Kibler, Ellen Semonoff, Charlotte Avant, Tina Alu, Sally Benbasset, Ramsey Beckett, Jessica Daniels, Shubham Dhital, Louis DePasquale, Susan Flannery, Rob Haas, Andrea Collymore.

Absent: Betty Bardige, Jeff Young, Susan Flannery, Humbi Song, Steve Swanger. *The City Council and the School Committee have not yet appointed their representatives for this term.*

Guests: Jennifer Bailey, Lei-Ann Ellis, Betsy Abrams, Zach Spitz, Mekides Mezgebu, Daniel Ruben, Lee Gianetti, Allentza Michel, Damon Lewis, Esther Jules, Isobel Schpeiser, Hannah Auberg, Claude Jacob, Jason Vasquez-Li, Luc De Marrais.

A. Call to Order

Welcome & Introductions

Meeting Called to Order at 6:10pm by acting City Council Chair Ken Reeves

Chair Ken Reeves explains that he is acting as City Council Chair until the City Council concludes its mayoral selection process, and that Lee Gianetti, former Chief of Staff to Mayor David Maher, is acting as the Executive Director of the Kids' Council until a permanent Executive Director can be hired.

He asks everyone present to introduce themselves, which they do.

B. Review/Adoption of Minutes

November 17, 2011

Chair Ken Reeves suggests he would entertain a motion to adopt the minutes from the prior meeting of the Council.

Ramsey Beckett points out that Katalina Nguyen's name is spelled incorrectly.

Claude Jacob clarifies that his comment about the cake being trans-fat free had been intended as a joke.

Action Taken: Claude Jacob moves the adoption of the minutes from the previous meeting, with corrections to Katalina Nguyen's name and to his comment about cake. Ramsey Beckett seconds the motion, and it succeeds by unanimous voice vote. The minutes are adopted as amended.

C. Public Commentary

Chair Ken Reeves says that this is the fun part of the meeting, during which anyone can say anything.

Shubham Dhital refers to the ongoing process of selecting a new Executive Director for the Council, and proposes that a representative of the Youth Involvement Subcommittee (YIS) be involved in the process.

Chair Reeves responds that this discussion is on the agenda for later in the meeting, which Shubham appreciates.

Allentza Michel announces that YIS has had a favorable article written about its ongoing voting rights campaign by the National Youth Rights Association. *The Council applauds this news.*

Chair Reeves asks if any other members of the public have comments. None do.

Chair Reeves then mentions a resolution about pre-registering students in 11th grade for voting, a resolution which had been brought before the School Committee at the behest of one of its student representatives at its recent meeting. He wonders if the YIS is aware of, or is a part of, this effort.

Ramsey Beckett responds that YIS is not focusing as heavily on the youth voting issue this year, and that when it was last year, preregistration had not been its primary concern.

Chair Reeves seeks to confirm that the preregistration effort is not conflicting with prior efforts of the YIS.

Ramsey confirms, adding that YIS had discussed shifting its focus to voter preregistration, but decided to continue with its efforts at lowering the voting age.

Andrea Collymore raises concerns she's heard from other parents that, while being able to swim is a requirement for high school graduation, perhaps the requirement should be earlier, as children could drown before then.

Chair Reeves asks if anyone is aware of Cambridge having recently lost children to drowning.

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Ellen Semonoff responds that she is not aware of any Cambridge drownings. She adds that the School Department gives swimming lessons in 4th or 5th Grade, though there is no requirement that students actually learn to swim.

Chair Reeves asks which subcommittee of the Council should tackle this issue.

Ellen responds that the subcommittees haven't been used that way in recent years, and suggests to Chair Reeves that, as acting Mayor, he could bring the issue to the School Committee. She adds that the Human Services Department provides lessons through its summer camps, and asks if there is more that needs to be done.

Chair Reeves points out that the minutes will reflect that this was brought up as a matter of concern. He also suggests developing a "parking lot" for issues like this which the Council would want to continuously monitor.

Barbara Kibler notes that almost all of the private summer camps offer swimming lessons.

Chair Reeves asks if there is any requirement that the children learn to swim.

Barbara responds that there is not, and adds that time is a factor, as the private camps only get access to the public pools once per week.

D. Updates & Announcements

Chair Ken Reeves asks if anyone has updates or announcements.

Lee Gianneti directs the Council to a membership directory form inside their packets, and asks all members to fill it out.

Claude Jacob announces that the Public Health Department's biennial middle grades health survey, a collaboration with a number of stakeholders, will be presented at the City Hall Annex at noon on Monday 23 January.

Claude also announces the publication of the recent Public Health Bulletin, providing a snapshot of public health in Cambridge with some metrics, some pictures, and other information. He adds that it will soon be available as a PDF.

Tina Alu announces that the CEOC has begun its free tax preparation services. She states she will send a PDF of the flyers to the Council.

Chair Reeves asks if any of the youth present know what the CEOC is.

A YIS member responds that she doesn't know what it stands for, but remembers that she was involved with them in some way in preschool.

Tina says that it stands for Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee, and that it is the main anti-poverty program in Cambridge, providing a food pantry, a preschool, tax preparation, tenant services, financial education and coaching, and other programs and policy work.

Mekides Mezgebu asks if there are requirements for those opportunities.

Tina responds that, to use the food pantry, one must be a Cambridge resident.

Chair Reeves provides, as an example, that if you are a tenant, and your landlord wants to come in to paint without having arranged for it beforehand, the CEOC can help you keep that from happening.

Tina adds that the Committee has capabilities in Haitian Creole, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Chair Reeves asks if there are any other announcements. Hearing none, he offers his own.

Chair Reeves shares some thoughts on the schools' Innovation Agenda:

There is a lot of language floating around. I was chairing a meeting the other day and people were talking about 'triads' and 'biads' and I didn't know what they were talking about. So I wanted to let you know that the triads are the sets of three elementary schools which will feed into one middle school, and the biad will be the set of two elementary schools which feeds into one middle school. There is also discussion of having one triad be focused on low-income students, and people have started shouting this idea down before looking at it carefully.

There was also discussion at this meeting as to what would be different about teaching. There was talk of making all the classes "heterogeneous", with learners of different levels able to receive "differentiated instruction". As part of this, it was announced that ISPs will be ended, which has people upset. The important point, which I think needs to be emphasized, is that there shouldn't be so many pop-outs for special attention, but that the focus should be on every student, in a pluralistic way.

I made an observation at this meeting that perhaps I should have kept to myself, that there is nothing particularly innovative about all this. But I realize that, perhaps, the true innovation is in really, truly, focusing on a pluralistic school system which meets every student's needs.

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This school issue is important to us, and I think something which could really be innovative would be to focus more on what we'll be talking about later, which is pre-kindergarten learning, to ensure that students come into kindergarten ready. I think this is one of the biggest issues facing the City at the moment.

Allentza Michel shares that she, Lee, Aiyanna, and Claude had been at a meeting of the Cambridge Prevention Coalition. At this meeting, Police Commissioner Haas presented on all the programs which have integrated to do prevention awareness and door-to-door outreach. She adds that it was a great presentation.

Rob Haas adds that no one agency has ownership over this project, but everyone involved works together to keep people moving forward in a productive way, as though on a conveyor belt. He continues that this program has been evolving over its four years, and that some graduate students from Harvard studied the program, wrote about it, and made a useful flowchart.

Chair Reeves points out that using "conveyor belt" in this way is something Geoff Canada does in his work, and he's glad to see it gaining use here.

Chair Reeves shares one more thought, mentioning that he had been at a sing-along at the library, an event which was so popular that people needed tickets in order to attend. He suggests increasing capacity in the parking lot, as the great programs the library provides could be even better if more people could take advantage of them.

E. Baby U.

Chair Ken Reeves asks Ellen Semonoff to begin this section of the meeting.

Presentation and Update on Baby U.

Ellen Semonoff begins by briefly outlining Baby U.. The question behind it, she says, is, "How do we make sure children enter school ready to learn?". The work of Baby U., she says, is about parents, the role they play, and the role the community can play in helping parents be the best parents they can be. She adds that the program is a citywide collaboration, with many of those present involved in one way or another.

Jennifer Bailey begins with a quick history of Baby U.:

In 2008, a number of folks from Cambridge went to the Harlem Children's Zone to learn about that program and think about what would make sense for Cambridge. They came back very excited, with two programs in particular which they felt could be transported well: Baby College and the Office of College Success. Baby U. is our version of Baby College. We're now on our fourth cohort of parents.

When we started, we agreed on a few things we believed and wanted to demonstrate. First, we wanted to acknowledge that parenting is hard work. Second, parenting, the parent/child relationship, and play are all important to a child. Third, we all have tools we bring in to our parenting. Parents come in to the program with their own toolboxes, and we're hoping to add tools to them. Fourth, parenting is an ongoing learning project, and it changes as a child grows up. Fifth, there are resources available in the community to help parents. As we were preparing this presentation, it occurred to us that, though we've evolved the program since it began, we have not changed our guiding philosophy.

The program itself involves ten weeks of workshops, then five weeks of playgroups combined with home visits, and then a graduation ceremony to celebrate all the hard work. These parents join us every Saturday morning for 16 weeks. Each week, we also share another community resource with the parents. Among the changes we made when porting this program to Cambridge was adding the playgroups; Harlem Children's Zone is a nine-week program. They serve parents of children from birth to three years old, while we increase the upper limit a little bit. In the Harlem Children's Zone, they have a pipeline in place of successive programs running from birth through high school, but we don't have all our other programs in place yet. Their program is run by one organization, whereas we have 15 or so community groups collaborating and joining in a steering committee, which itself has nine subcommittees. We have an incredibly dedicated staff who do hard work every day, and they've been flexible as we've changed.

So far, we've had three pilot cohorts. We had 23 families in North Cambridge, 25 families in Area IV, and 25 families in Riverside. Among the statistics: 19% of the families have had perfect attendance, and 80% of them have attended 12 or more of the 15 weeks. We've had less success in getting fathers involved—in the first pilot, there was one, in the second pilot, two, and in the third pilot, three. We hired one of the fathers from the third pilot as part of our staff, to break off and have a workshop with just the fathers every now and then. Something we'll be adding for the fourth class is a Family Night.

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We're constantly evaluating our progress. We began by evaluating the model and the format. Now that we have that where we want it, we're looking more closely at outcomes. After each pilot, more parents have understood the importance of support from other parents, and of speaking, playing, and connecting with their children, and strategies for raising their children. Some things parents have said which we've liked are, "I've learned to get curious, not furious", and, "Before, my children watched four to six hours of TV a day. Yesterday I didn't turn the TV on at all." These are good outcomes.

We've been reinforced in our conviction that parents want the best for their children. We also learned a lot more about logistics than we had thought about at first. On a given Saturday, we could have up to 100 people, and we needed to coordinate car seats, childcare, and many other things. We've also come to learn that the core program is important, but it's only a start. Lei-Ann will talk more about that.

Lei-Ann Ellis continues about Baby U.:

We got the funding secured on September 21, 2009, and 14 weeks later, we were running our first workshop. We've been building the car as it was running, and, from the beginning, we were only one workshop ahead. One thing we've now realized is, what happens after Baby U.? The Harlem Children's Zone has a pipeline of programs. There are 400 kids involved in the Baby College; of those, 100 will get in to a Harlem Children's Zone preschool. Here, parents would graduate, and they'd want to stay connected to the program. At the first graduation, Alice Wold took my arm and said, "You'd better not lose any of these families or kids." We had to figure out how to do this.

What we've come up with is a second phase: the Baby U. Alumni Association. We see change at the end of Baby U., but it's just the start. Parents would turn the TV off, but not know what to do instead. With the Baby U. Alumni Association, we have a varied set of programs, including workshops, picnics, and field trips. We have support groups with a craft activity, which we call "Parents' Talk", modeled on the idea of talking about serious issues while shelling peas around Grandma's table. All of this is held together with home visits.

Some issues we've had are that we didn't plan for this, so we still feel like we're driving the car while we're trying to build it. We have families in different neighborhoods now, and not all of them own cars. We're trying to run both Baby U. and the Alumni Association with a staff that was designed for just Baby U., and they're both labor-intensive.

We've learned that the core program is in good shape: it's not perfect, but at this point, we know what we're doing with Baby U. With the Alumni Association, we're still in the pilot phase. We've had a few breakthroughs—we've decided to keep the variety of options I mentioned before, but to add on to it a parallel track of programming focusing on specific age cohorts, one for parents of children from birth to 18 months, one from 19 to 36 months, and one from 37 months through kindergarten entry. The goal of this is to help parents develop skills specific to the age of their child. One thing in particular we want to develop, and we've been working with Karen Mapp on this, is to get the parents of the oldest group of children integrated with the public schools. Altogether, we've been thinking of how to support these three age groups so that, when the children begin at Cambridge Public Schools, they are ready to take off and their parents are ready to become partners with the teachers and advocates for their children. We're also learning we need better relationships with the various agencies, so we don't just tell parents to go to the library, for example, but we have a partner at the library who knows what we're about. Also, in September 2012, we'll have a cohort based out of Fletcher-Maynard Academy. What will it mean for us to be working with an elementary school which serves needy children?

Next, Betsy is going to share the human connection, and tell stories only she can about the families.

Betsy Abrams continues:

It's been an honor to be on the ground with the birth of this program. There's been an incredible team of people making this program a reality. The families we've worked with have been wonderful. The other night, for example, we had a potluck, and it was a freezing-cold night, but people brought all sorts of dishes to share. Separately, we weren't designing this program with teen moms in mind, but we've had a few, and they've been fabulous. One of them pulled one of us aside and introduced us to her friend who could use help.

One thing we discuss with the parents is not only what we bring from our histories that we do want to pass on, but that we do not want to pass on. We had one parent who said, "The abuse stops with me." We then have to help them through what to do instead. Parents are vulnerable to losing their patience and feeling bad about

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themselves, so there's value in having a community around to provide support. This is why the alumni work is so important.

We also have a great group of teenagers from the Cambridge Work Force program who are there at 7:30 every Saturday to help us set up. They're part of the community we're building, too, and it's great to have them.

We had a workshop on how to have less stress and more fun. We started by having people share something positive. One woman from Morocco shared that she learned Spanish in order to better communicate with a friend of hers from the program. One woman shared that this was the first holiday season in her family without violence. We also had a yoga event, because it's important to stop and take a breath every now and then. We had an apple-picking event, and for many of the parents, this was their first time picking apples. It rained on the way there, but the skies cleared just long enough to pick apples. On the bus ride there, there was singing in so many languages. We're building a community in which people feel safe, and can share their struggles and their triumphs. People are remembering their successes and are able to build on them.

Discussion

Chair Reeves asks Jennifer, Lei-Ann, and Betsy to grab seats in the middle of the room.

Charlotte Avant asks, regarding the quantitative data presented on the slides, how there were so many parents who, going in, didn't know the importance of speaking, playing, and connecting with their children. She wonders how old the parents are and what cultures they come from.

Jennifer admits she may not have been clear in the slide, but the question was more about the importance of playing specifically, and not the loving and caressing that all parents do know.

Lei-Ann adds that the youngest parent has been a junior at CRLS, and that there are also grandparents raising their grandchildren involved in the program, so there's a wide range of ages.

Susan Flannery shares that at the first Baby U. graduation, one of the students who spoke told of creating a home where toys were readily available, i.e. strewn about the house, and how it was hard for her when her family came to visit, as they saw a disorganized house as a negative. The student spoke of realizing the importance of having control of her house, and not relying on her extended family's opinions.

Chair Reeves takes a minute to make sure that those sitting behind him can get his attention if they want to speak.

Claude Jacob points out the importance of keeping in mind cultural and social contexts, especially once the program begins relying more and more on the students' existing communities. He thinks that Baby U. has done well to realize that there's a balance to be struck between telling the students what to do and listening from them what they know.

Claude adds that it would be helpful to see a snapshot of the demographic mix involved in the program so far.

A YIS member asks if teenagers can volunteer for the program and accrue community service hours.

Betsy says that could be a possibility, as a large staff is needed to manage the program.

A YIS member asks if the teenagers from The Work Force work with the just the parents or also with the children.

Lei-Ann responds that most of the teens work with the children, and sometimes they help with the parents.

Chair Reeves adds that he wants to make sure everyone is aware of what The Work Force does, providing work opportunities for teenagers who live in public housing.

Ramsey Beckett inquires as to the relationship between alumni and current students.

Betsy responds that the main involvement right now is with recruitment and outreach, but that they're open to further integration and alumni involvement in the future.

Lei-Ann adds that they've been thinking about parent leadership but haven't gotten to there yet.

A YIS member shares that she is in The Work Force, and had been with Baby U. at one point. She hadn't been able to stay with Baby U., but while she was there, it helped her feel more a part of the community. She adds that her friends who've stayed with Baby U. have had great experiences.

Barbara Kibler, noting the hard work and dedication of all those involved, expresses her desire that the program be available to every family which needs it. One pressure point she sees is that not all families who could benefit from this program are going to be reached without the help of other organizations in the city.

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Chair Reeves seeks to confirm that she is looking at the question of scale.

Barbara answers that she's thinking of both scale and future. She is asking about both how to grow the program without diminishing its success, and how to teach the skills to additional staff so that they can be involved and help it grow.

Claude asks if there might be opportunities, additional to the connection with The Work Force, to reach out to and connect with other communities within the City. He also wonders about ties between families and various services, such as health services, similar to how dental screenings are done through the schools.

Jennifer responds that this is an area for growth they have considered. She continues that they want to add more connections to the 16 weeks, but there is no room. She stresses that this is a value of the Alumni Association. She adds that, with health, they talk about exercise and stress, but they don't connect parents to healthcare providers.

Claude says the limited time of the core program is a great reason for tackling this challenge through the Alumni Association.

Jennifer confirms and says that's what they want to do with it.

Lei-Ann adds that they'll be coming to Claude for help with this.

Tina Alu wonders, outside of the planned activities, how much alumni of the program are connecting with each other and interacting with each other.

Betsy responds that one person invited other families over for Thanksgiving, they're offering each other rides to programs, and people are making those connections, some more than others.

Sally Benbasset asks what has surprised Betsy, Jennifer, and Lei-Ann the most so far.

For **Betsy**, it's the community-building among the families, and the trust they've been able to build.

For **Jennifer**, it's that families are committing to coming all 16 weeks and valuing the program to that extent.

For **Lei-Ann**, it's the depth of emotion and attachment from the staff for the students, and the complicated logistics involved.

Betsy adds that they are fortunate to have some good logistical minds on their team.

For **Ellen**, the surprising thing (which she admits, perhaps, should not have surprised her) is the depth of commitment on the part of the members of the steering committee, and their collaboration. She notes this provides an alternate model to that of the Harlem Children's Zone, which takes a top-down approach to Baby College. She says she knew people were committed, but is surprised at how they have sustained their commitments.

A YIS member asks what time the program ends every Saturday.

Betsy responds that set-up begins at 7:30, parents come at 9:15 and stay until noon, and the staff leaves around 1:30.

Claude refers to the involvement of fathers in the program, sharing that the City has, looked into developing some sort of fatherhood-specific program, but, since it has not happened yet, it's important to keep an eye on how Baby U. serves fathers specifically.

Chair Reeves, while mindful of the time and of the meeting's agenda, asks about incentives for attendance.

Lei-Ann responds, speaking of gift certificates for either Market Basket or Target, raffling off a toy, and two \$400 checks which are also raffled off.

Chair Reeves asks if there is food involved.

Betsy responds that there is.

Chair Reeves mentions that there are multiple community groups which can organize multitudes of volunteers who could be useful to Baby U. He also brings up that there's a certain amount of received wisdom available through books and other means which certain segments of the middle class can use to help them in their parenting, and that this wisdom is not available or known to everyone. He sees part the value of Baby U. as spreading that wisdom. He also shares that, in all his time attending Council meetings, this is the best and most hopeful presentation he's seen. *The Council applauds Jennifer, Lei-Ann, and Betsy for their presentation.*

Chair Reeves adds that this was one presentation which didn't feel rushed.

F. Executive Director of the Kids' Council

Chair Ken Reeves asks Lee Gianetti to share the current state of the Executive Director search.

Updates on the Recruitment/Hiring Process

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Lee Gianetti speaks:

The Executive Director's job was posted on January 5, and closes on February 8. Everyone on the Council's email list got the PDF of the application. The Personnel department tells me that 11 people have applied for the job. The posting is out to local universities, and Barbara Allen at Cambridge Public Schools has it. The Executive Committee met a week ago to discuss the process. We'll be putting together a committee to do the interviews and then make a recommendation to the City Manager, who will do the hiring.

Chair Reeves points out that all present would want to help in generating candidates, and asks anyone who'd like to help out further in the process to, at some point, step forward.

Lee adds that there hasn't yet been consensus on who would be doing the interviewing, but asks anyone interested in any part of this process to get in touch with him. He also says that one topic being discussed is what qualities the Council wants in its next Executive Director, and in what direction the Council would want to be pushed by the net Executive Director. He thinks this could be discussed both in the Council and by email.

Chair Reeves says that, as the process continues, it may be necessary to hold meetings on the weekend to ensure that all stakeholders, especially youth, can participate in the process.

Chair Reeves reminds that the posting closes on February 8, which he remembers because it's his birthday. He adds that everyone should be beating the ground for good candidates, and that there should be 1100 people, not 11, who want this job.

Discussion/Feedback

Claude seeks to clarify if there's a tentative timeline for filling the position.

Ellen Semonoff responds that, with looking through the resumes, calling people in for interviews, and callback interviews, the end of March is realistic for selecting a director, and the person would begin after that.

Chair Reeves recommends to Lee that he check with the Schott Foundation, and asks Ellen if she remembers a woman they worked with at Cambridge College.

Ellen remembers the woman, but not her name.

Neil Michaels offers that the woman is named Valora.

Chair Reeves points out that Neil was the first Executive Director of the Council, and asks if he has any words of wisdom to impart.

Neil says he'd be happy to help, though perhaps not right now.

Chair Reeves mentions that the Executive Committee meets once a month to plan the Council's meetings, and that there's not yet a consensus on the process to be used in the search, but they'd like to hear any thoughts or concerns.

Ramsey Beckett expresses her hope that youth be represented in every step of the process.

Chair Reeves mentions the structural problem of the Executive Committee meeting during the day due to the schedules of many of those involved.

Ramsey responds that she was thinking specifically of the hiring process, though she is intrigued by the idea of having youth representation on the Executive Committee.

Chair Reeves checks if anyone else would like to speak. No one would.

G. Next Steps

Next Kids' Council Meeting: February 16, 2012 (6:00 pm – 8:00 pm)

Chair Ken Reeves shares that the next meeting will be held at 6:00 pm on February 16 at the City Hall Annex.

Chair Reeves adds that the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education recently reported back to the City Council. The report, he says, suggested that many early childhood care providers are isolated and could use more pedagogical training and support. He points out that the Council's focus is often limited to City programs and those with public funding, but it's important also to shine a light on private providers.

Chair Reeves adds that he, Ellen Semonoff, and Rob Haas have been serving on a commission which has spent 16 months discussing Central Square, and one thing that has come up is that, if there is going to be more economic

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development, there are going to need to be more community resources. He asks Ellen if she has anything additional to say on this.

Ellen Semonoff responds that Ken covered the topic well.

Chair Reeves emphasizes that early learning and early childhood care are important, and notes there is no one representing the School Department at this meeting.

Chair Reeves thanks all for being here.

Ellen reminds all that Lee Gianetti needs the directory form he handed out.

The meeting is adjourned at 8:04 pm.

Meeting Documents: 1) Minutes from the Kids' Council Meeting of 19 January 2012; 2) Slide printouts from presentation on Baby U.; 3) Membership Directory information form