

## KIDS' COUNCIL MEETING

March 25, 2010  
5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

### Agenda

- A. Call to Order / Announcements David Maher (5:00)
- Introductions
- B. Review / Adoption of Minutes Mary Wong (5:15)
- October 15, 2009
- C. Public Commentary David Maher (5:20)
- D. Kids' Council FY2010 Budget Mary Wong (5:30)
1. Budget Goals & Performance Measures
    - a. Operations
    - b. Efforts / Initiatives
  2. Funding
    - a. Operations
    - b. Efforts / Initiatives
- E. Strategic Plan FY2010 – FY2012 David Maher (5:50)
1. Implementation Updates
    - a. Report on Strategic Goal #3 Geoff Marietta  
*Sharing Information about Policies and Programs*
    - b. Report on Outcome Subcommittees Mary Wong
- F. Next Steps David Maher (6:20)
- **Next Kids' Council Meetings: April 15 & May 20 (6:00 – 8:00pm)**
  - **April 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting: School Initiatives; Council Self-Evaluation**
  - **May 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting: Outcome Subcommittees' Presentation on Indicators & Measures**

**Cambridge Kids' Council Meeting  
25 March 2010**

Present: Mayor David Maher, Kenneth Reeves, Steve Swanger, Ellen Semonoff, Sam Seidel, Pasang Lhamo, Robert Haas, Betty Bardige, Andrea Collymore, Mary Wong

**A. Call to Order / Announcements**

Mayor Maher calls the meeting to order at 5:20 pm.

Mayor Maher welcomes everyone to the first meeting of the Kids' Council in his term, and introduces his Education Liaison, Bridget Rodriguez, and his co-Chair, Ken Reeves. Mayor Maher then asks everyone present to introduce themselves. He also recognizes members of the youth delegation to the National League of Cities conference in Washington, D.C. this month and asks them to comment on their trip. Everyone present introduces themselves and the youth delegation generally found the trip to the conference to be very rewarding. A quorum is not present.

Mayor Maher invites Mary Wong to make an announcement.

Mary informs the Council that Ellen Semonoff would like to speak for a few minutes about the Baby University.

Ellen mentions that Steve Swanger is also on the steering committee of Baby U. At some future point, she would like to bring in those more deeply involved in the program to speak to the Council. The Council has heard much about the Harlem Children's Zone, says Ellen, and Cambridge is now implementing its version of their Baby College, calling it Baby U. Ellen passes around copies of the calendar of workshops within Baby U, with their logo on top. Ellen shares the following details of Baby U:

The program is starting in North Cambridge, with 26 families participating for 16 weeks (as opposed to Harlem's Baby College which runs for nine weeks). There are two cohorts, one for parents whose youngest child is an infant or a toddler, and one for parents whose youngest child is up to age three. Two babies have been born so far.

Ellen shares what has been, for her, the most moving moment of her involvement with Baby U so far:

One participant, a 20-year-old new mother of 13 days, had been couch-surfing before the birth of her child. Since then, she has been living in a shelter and is soon to move into a group living arrangement. This new mother didn't want to miss the workshop and managed to find a ride to the workshop 13 days after her baby was born. One thing that stuck with this new mother, from the second workshop, was a demonstration involving bags of rice of varying sizes, indicating the size of a baby's brain at different stages of growth. This demonstrated to the new mother the importance of every single thing she does with her baby.

Ellen continued to share details of the program:

There are a couple of dads involved, one of them a recent graduate of the City's Transitional Jobs program who has found a job and has been coming with the mother of his child to Baby U workshops. In each cohort there is the same facilitator each week, and often a different member of the community leading a workshop in his area of expertise. There are two "Care Workers" who do home visits, such that each family gets a visit between workshop sessions in order to reinforce the lessons from the workshop and inquire into other needs the family might have. At

the conclusion of each workshop session, various resources are brought in, such as the Public Library, Mental Health Services, and others. The program provides transportation for the families as well as childcare for the older children. Some of the assistants with the childcare portion of the program are current WorkForce students and the program uses WorkForce's space at Jefferson Park and the HeadStart classrooms.

Steve Swanger begins sharing his perspective. He mentions that the program is being run a little differently in Cambridge than it has been run in New York. He notes his amazement at how many agencies have been able to come together and quickly, within the space of two months, think through and begin to implement this program. To Steve, this indicates the level of commitment and competence of the agencies involved. In Harlem, Steve says, it is one agency able to work top-down, where in Cambridge the program requires the cooperation of several agencies, which is working. Another difference Steve points out is that the Cambridge program has added a series of play groups in addition to the workshops and home visits in which the parents can begin to implement what they've learned and confer with the other parents.

Ellen mentions that the graduation is scheduled for June 12. She indicates a desire to work with Mayor Maher, Councilor Reeves, and Mary to see to it that those more involved with the program can share their experiences with the Council.

Mayor Maher asks if there is a wait-list for Baby U. Ellen answers that, due to the length of the program, there was no expressed interest in North Cambridge that has gone unmet. She says the plan is to do this again in Area IV starting in September 2010, and that the longer recruiting time could lead to more families being interested than are able to be served.

Mayor Maher asks if there will be some sort of evaluation and reconfiguration between the end of the North Cambridge program and the beginning of the Area IV program. Ellen answers that every parent fills out an evaluation at the end of every workshop, and that, in addition, a more-formal evaluation process is ongoing.

Ken Reeves asks about an incentive idea. Ellen responds that there are a few incentives for attendance. One of those incentives is a drawing every week for children's toys, and another is a drawing at the end of the program for a grand prize, eligible to those families who attend enough of the sessions.

Ken then asks whether the Area IV program and the North Cambridge program will be happening concurrently. Ellen answers that current plans don't include a second round in North Cambridge, and that the working group is looking into what to do for parents post-Baby U. Ken points out there is a hole into which one could fall if the timing of the birth of their child doesn't coincide nicely with the schedule of the program. Ellen responds that they are trying to minimize this problem. Ken commends Ellen and those working on Baby U for doing a "miraculous job."

Ken mentions that in Harlem, they created a video presentation on what people got out of the program and wonders if Cambridge could do something similar.

John Clifford asks if there is only one Baby U program occurring at a time. Ellen responds that the current funding level and the current staff capacity necessitate this.

Mayor Maher asks if there are any other questions.

Sam Seidel asks Ellen to speak to why sixteen weeks was chosen as the length of the program,

rather than the nine weeks in Harlem. Ellen responds that the concern was that it would take a long time for the families to become comfortable enough with each other and with the staff. With the extra time, she says, the playgroups will be an excellent opportunity to reinforce and model what has been learned in the workshops. Ellen expresses her concern that the program would not be able to keep parents for such a long time, but adds that so far, it seems to be working.

Steve adds attendance has been good, and in the few cases in which parents have missed sessions, they have called in ahead of time.

Mayor Maher asks if there other announcements. There are none.

## **B. Review / Adoption of Minutes**

Mayor Maher recommends skipping this item due to lack of a quorum and all present agree.

## **C. Public Commentary**

Mayor Maher asks if there any present who are not members of the Council who would like to offer public testimony. There are none.

## **D. Kids' Council FY2011 Budget**

Mayor Maher asks Mary Wong to introduce the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2011.

Mary mentions that the budget narrative of goals and performance measures has been handed out to those present.

Mary begins talking about the first budget goal, which is preparing "... a Status Report on the State of Cambridge Children and Families." Mary points the Council's attention to the third item listed under this goal, which is the "percentage completed in development of plan for data collection and analysis to track identified indicators." She states the outcome subcommittees of the Council have been developing the indicators, and that as soon as that is completed, the Council needs to plan for the collection and analysis of that data.

Mary goes on to discuss the second budget goal, which pertains to university partnerships. The current partnership, Mary states, is with the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

The third budget goal, Mary mentions, is to conduct a year-end self-evaluation of the Council. Mary informs the Council that this year, the tools are being put in place and that next month the process will commence. She indicates her hope that this becomes a permanent fixture of the Council.

Mary says the fourth budget goal relates to the Youth Involvement Subcommittee, which has determined its own goals for the next year.

Mary then introduces the budget for the Council, which has been distributed to those present. The items in the budget include, as Mary shares, operations, the Youth Involvement Subcommittee, and the Center for Families. The second page of the budget, as Mary mentions, includes various initiatives of the Council, such as the Agenda for Children, the King Open Extended Day program, and the Center for Families. Mary emphasizes that the director's salary is split evenly among the City's Department of Human Services, the schools, and the Cambridge Health Alliance. The last

piece Mary mentions is Cambridge Connections, which continues support for the 0-8 Committee and early-childhood programs associated with it.

Mayor Maher thanks Mary for her presentation. On account of the lack of a quorum, Mayor Maher asks for objections to the proposed budget without asking for formal approval thereof. There are no objections, and Mayor Maher notes there are many smiling faces.

## **E. Strategic Plan FY2010–FY2012**

Mayor Maher invites Geoff Marietta to update the Council on the implementation of the Strategic Plan's Goal #3.

Geoff Marietta introduces himself as a volunteer for the Council. Geoff tells that in the fall, he spoke with Mary Wong about the implementation of Strategic Goal #3. Geoff points the members' attention to the copy of his slideshow which has been distributed to them and invites any with questions to write them on the slide to which they pertain.

Geoff shares the following about Strategic Goal #3, which is “Sharing Information about Policies and Programs”:

He researched, on the internet, all the information available there as to the various agencies in the City involved in the work of the Council. With Mary's help, he set up interviews with department heads, including Susan Flannery, Robert Haas, Claude Jacob, Ellen Semonoff, Jeff Young, and Carolyn Turk. He asked them about the various committees, task forces, and coalitions serving children in the City. He found broad agreement that Cambridge is “resource-rich”. The six main collaborations Geoff found are the 0-8 Council, the Agenda for Children Steering Committee, the Cambridge Prevention Coalition, the City Council Human Services Committee, the Healthy Children's Task Force, and the Kids' Council. There are also many smaller partnerships throughout the City.

The 0-8 Council focuses on early childhood and brings together caregivers, providers, the public schools, the libraries, and Human Services.

The Agenda for Children Steering Committee provides the main structure for literacy and after-school initiatives. It is co-administered by the Department of Public Health and the Department of Human Services, and includes the public schools, the Health Alliance, the police department, the Community Foundation, the Kids' Council, and the libraries.

The Cambridge Prevention Coalition has over 30 organizations focusing on the prevention of substance abuse.

The City Council's Human Services Committee has been the catalyst for Baby U and other initiatives.

The Healthy Children's Task Force focuses on children's health.

The Kids' Council aims to provide a comprehensive response to all these issues.

Among the program-specific partnerships are Baby U, the Center for Families, Healthy Homes, Police Youth Academy, the Public Library Teen Advisory Board, Reaching All Youth, the Youth Employment Initiative, and the Youth Sports Commission.

Geoff says there are a lot of different programs serving the youth of Cambridge, and cataloging them all like this is just a first step.

Geoff presents charts showing which elements of the City and of the community are involved with which of the many collaborations, and he notes there is a great deal of overlap. In terms of moving forward, Geoff sees what he's done so far as useful in compiling the information but points out that the idea behind Strategic Goal #3 is to publicize all this information. Geoff asks if there are questions.

Ellen Semonoff informs Geoff that each term, two or three committees, often named after a colored ribbon, are formed to look at specific issues, and she points out there is often a great deal of overlap with the permanent collaborations already in place. Geoff asks for clarification as to whether these committees expire at the end of their respective terms. Mayor Maher says these committees usually have a start and an end, but wonders if these committees are serving a different purpose. Ellen mentions some of the specific committees she has in mind, such as the after-school committee, the green-ribbon committee about youth and the environment, and others. Mayor Maher says he'll forward Geoff the information about these ribbon committees.

Someone in the gallery asks for Geoff's thoughts on this. Ken Reeves wonders if this approach is looking like a little bit of overkill. Geoff responds that it's too early to reach conclusions, and that right now he is still mapping out the structure of the services. Geoff adds that he's found, in his research, that coordination leads to better results, and that he sees Cambridge as being not only resource-rich but collaboration-rich, which he points out is a good and bad thing.

Ken wonders about academic achievement, and the gaps in academic achievement among various demographic groups in the City. He worries that the parents of lower-achieving children are choosing schools based on comfort and other factors that will not improve their children's academic achievement. He wonders how to make clear to parents that mediocrity is not acceptable.

Mayor Maher responds to this by pointing out that a lot of the data on a school's achievement will be available to parents under new reporting regulations issued by the Commonwealth. He agrees with Ken's concern, but expresses hope that this data can lead to better choices.

Ken reiterates his concern that choices about schools are being made for non-academic reasons, and wonders what good information about achievement will do if parents make choices regardless of that information. Ken wonders how to communicate that academic achievement should be a primary factor in a parent's choice of a school.

Someone from the gallery notes that there are school councils consisting of parents of the students in a school, and she thinks they should be meeting more frequently than they currently do.

Another guest wonders how the different groups Geoff mentioned communicate with each other. She wonders how the different efforts can be fused together.

Bridget Rodriguez asks Geoff to elaborate on his professional background, to help the Council understand his point of view. Geoff responds, noting his roots in Minnesota, his teaching and school administration experience on a Navajo reservation, his business school research into how schools run, and his current studies of collaborations at Harvard's Graduate School of Education.

John Clifford returns to Ken's point about parents and wonders about administrators.

Ken shares an anecdote from a school administrator he knows about a school trip that required some funding from parents. Ken relays how many parents wanted scholarships for the trip, despite their children having expensive cell phones and sneakers. This led to the cancellation of the trip for lack of funds. He says this illustrates nicely the point that parents are making choices based on priorities other than what will provide their child with the best education, and how this has become clear with the City's middle schools. He goes on to mention that it's not just minority parents who make these choices, but also white parents, whom he has seen speak eloquently on the desire to stay in a comfortable but underachieving school. It seems to Ken as though educational outcomes are not a priority for a lot of parents.

Ellen recalls data about stronger academics and proper behavior, and how some parents prioritize one and some parents prioritize the other. She wonders if this divide also plays into the issue Ken has raised about "comfort." Ken responds that many kids of color in underachieving schools have IEPs and behavioral issues, which drive the white upper-middle-class parents to seek other schools where their children can learn. He says behavior is an important concern for many parents.

Mayor Maher mentions, relatedly, that the Superintendent has announced that the discussion on middle schools is a much wider one than what had originally been considered, and that the discussion will be extended to allow for the added breadth. Mayor Maher says that the Superintendent recognizes some immediate changes that need to be made in the middle schools, but also recognizes that a comprehensive plan is going to require more time.

Ken states that he met with middle school students, and came to the conclusion that no change was going to happen for the City's middle schools because no one was going to vote based on middle schools. He thinks the City should be focusing on fixing the current system rather than risk creating a two-tiered system for the future.

John points out the Superintendent has been given a mandate of 100 days to look into the middle school problem, to which Mayor Maher agrees, but points out that the various parties came to the realization that 100 days was insufficient. Ken notes that the Superintendent asked for 150 days, and that the deadline keeps getting extended. He also notes that he respects the school committee but hopes to see some policy changes come out of all this discussion.

Mayor Maher thanks Geoff for all his time and effort, and asks Mary Wong to report on the Outcome Subcommittees.

Mary states that she will be guiding people with a PowerPoint presentation and some information that has been handed out. Ken notes that his godson's picture is featured on the slideshow.

Mary tells the Council the following:

There are five outcomes on which the Council has settled as important goals. Each has been assigned to its own subcommittee. The first task for each subcommittee has been to develop indicators and measures to help track the progress of these outcomes. Harvard's Kennedy School of Government has been helpful in this. Most of the subcommittees have Kennedy School students working with them on this task. The Kennedy School students have been praising the involvement of the members of the Youth Involvement Subcommittee (YIS). The YIS members have helped the Council members recognize when they were using jargon that would be difficult to understand for the general public. One hurdle has been getting parent and resident involvement.

Ken interjects that there is another issue involved. He notes that recent immigration crackdowns are causing major disruptions. He mentions that people in Cambridge are aware of this issue, but not necessarily of its extent.

Mary notes that, coincidentally, a Harvard Kennedy School student has recently contacted her on this very issue, and the student is currently involved with the Student Immigrant Movement. Mary invites Anais of the Youth Involvement Subcommittee to share what she has learned so far about this, and Anais agrees that this is an important issue.

Mary returns to her presentation on the states of the subcommittees:

The hope was to present the indicators and measures by February, but it seems now that was too ambitious. The new goal is May. The first step for the subcommittees was to identify their membership, which they all did in the fall. The next step was to meet with Julie Wilson of the Kennedy School to dissect their charged outcome into key elements. This included formulating observable goals that would indicate a successful outcome. This played into the following step of developing indicators related to the charged outcome. The next step after that was to organize the information in a uniform format. Right now, each subcommittee has its results in a different format, and some of them are more useful and comprehensive than others. The subcommittees will be working with a uniform format based on the work of Outcome #1 Subcommittee. The subcommittees are currently working on sorting their indicators and measures based on the Results Accountability Framework. This framework breaks indicators and measures into three categories. Primary Indicators are those that can be shared with the public and gets to the heart of the outcome. Secondary indicators are those which aren't as useful as Primary Indicators but that the relevant subcommittee still feels are important. Data Development is data that currently doesn't exist but the subcommittee feels could be useful in the future. The final step will be for the subcommittees to come together and share what they have with each other, and present it to the Council. All of the subcommittees have completed their first four objectives, but they are at different places on finishing their work. The goal of all this is publication of the Status Report to educate the community about the well being and importance in investment of our children, youth and families.

Mary shares the recent Cambridge Public Health Bulletin prepared and published by the Cambridge Health Alliance, and also a Progress Report on Children from Montgomery County in Ohio, as examples of what the Council is working toward. Mary asks if there are any questions.

Ken returns to the issue of data development, and mentions the Opportunity Agenda in New York, which is headed by Alan Jenkins in New York. The Opportunity Agenda, Ken says, uses data and media to raise equity across programs and initiatives. Ken states his interest on getting their assistance with data development. He is hoping to find some way to indicate to parents the effects that choosing a different school could have.

Mary adds that one of the first members of the Youth Involvement Subcommittee interned for the Opportunity Agenda. John indicates he knows how to get in touch with Alan Jenkins, and that Alan will be in town at the end of May.

Mayor Maher thanks Mary for her report and thanks everyone for being flexible with the timing of the meeting.

## **F. Next Steps**

Mayor Maher reminds the Council of the dates for the next two meetings, April 15 and May 20. Mary shares that the Superintendent will be presenting at the April meeting, the self-evaluation will occur at the April meeting, and hopefully the outcome subcommittee's work will be presented at the May meeting.

Mayor Maher thanks everyone for coming.

The meeting adjourns at 6:35pm.