



Thursday January 30, 2025

Summary of Conversation Topics

- Updates
 - Cambridge Youth Council
 - Youth Wellness Working Group
- Youth Wellness and Prevention Panel and Discussion with High School Students

Chair: Mayor Simmons

Co-Chair Sumbul Siddiqui

Members: Tina Alu, Eva Asraf, Jasper Adiletta, ~~Johanny Castillo~~, Christine Elow, Lida Griffins, Michelle Godfrey, Tabithlee Howard, Caroline Hunter, ~~Mike Johnston~~, Michelle Lower, Jasper Mallon, ~~Maria McCauley~~, Larisa Mendez-Penate, ~~Dave Murphy~~, ~~Matt Nelson~~, ~~Geeta Pradhan~~, Bridget Rodriguez, Ellen Semonoff, ~~Liz Stapleton~~, Tagesech Wabeto, Ayesha Wilson, ~~Derrick Neal~~

Executive Director: Nancy Tauber

Notetaker/Find It Manager: Andrew Liedtka

CYC Coordinator: Izzy Schpeiser

CYC Members: Abel Asefaw, Sophia Salehi, Musie Futsum, Lio Caravan,

Guests: Connor Epsteinkraus, Sarah Lincoln, Meagan Albright, Nadia Davila, Joyce Majewski, Marsé Romero, Mary Kowalczyk, Malene Council, Yemi Kibret, Jesus Armenta, Jen Baily, Vanessa Iwuoha, Melina O'Grady, Yoyo Yau, Kate Regal, Fred Fantini, Naz Napir, Clara Brinkman,

5:30 Welcome and Introductions

- Family Policy Council Business
 - Approval of December 4, 2024 Minutes
 - PASSES: Unanimously
- Public Comment
 - N/A
- Announcements
 - The Family Policy Council is the Advisory Council for The Center for Families, the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Grantee.

- Pathways for Immigrant Workers —helps people who have work permits but not Green Cards. Event at the Main Library to get help with a lawyer who can help them apply. Another flyer for immigrant legal resources referrals.
- Tomorrow is the last day for families to accept preschool placements (and the last day to apply to the CPS Kindergarten Lottery).

- 1-30-25 FPC Meeting Slide

Youth Wellness Working Group Update

Review NOTES from the December 4, 2024 Panel Discuss

- What stood out for you?
- What stood out
 - Growing up in the city and working in youth centers, care, commitment, and compassion the staff in the panel demonstrated for youth, 30 years later.
 - Mental wellness=deep connection.
 - It happens every day, we need to aware of it, reminder ourselves often
 - It's not one thing, there's always a new demand and yet it's still so long term that we can't fix it today.
 - Learning is modeling connections and diving into curiosity. As social worker always thinking about young people's mental health and wellbeing, always thinking about how we're showing up in spaces with young people. It also seems like they're also talking about it more now.
- What questions do you still have?
 - Could we work with Shawn Ginwright (Harvard Ed School)? Healing Centered Engagement and Flourish Agenda?

Youth Panel

- Facilitator - Sarah Lincoln
- Participants
 - Clara Brinkman
 - Naz Napir
 - Abel Asefaw
 - Jasper Adiletta
- Illustration - Sophia Salehi



How do you take care of yourself?

- Making time to relax, be by myself, watch a good movie.
- Hiking, wellness is taking care of ourselves.
- Listening to music
- Self-care, alone time, time to decompress

How do you define wellness?

- The state of your being
- Taking care of yourself
- Wellness is a priority, a basis for everything.
- Taking care of yourself and others around you
- Spreading positivity

How seriously do your peers take wellness?

- Youth don't think of mental health as mental health but as wellness. Changing the language is important. At the end of the day we all try to take care of ourselves, they look at it that way and not as traditional "mental health".
- Youth in general aren't very open to just talking about mental health
- Wellness is different for every person.
- Some people like to talk to others, some people just do things to take care of themselves.
- Poor mental health feels normalized in high school. We should be working on changing that and the stigmas.
- It can be hard to reach out for help.
- Wellness can be more of a subconscious thought, but people don't think of it actively and ask, "What can I do for my wellness?". They ask "what can I do for myself today" and attempt to take care of themselves.

How do you rectify the idea of wellness and the lack of poor mental health for young folks?

- We have a lot of resources but youth don't know about them or how to access them.
- Hard to get and pay for a therapist, lengthy and costly.
- People don't feel empowered to reach out for help and there's a lot of fear.
- People don't identify the importance of wellness and mental health as part of their identity or their priorities. They think of other things they're told to do (school work, activities, etc.)
- Some students are more connected than others. The students who need the most help don't know where to get it.
- Poor mental health stems from the idea that problems will go away on their own if you just keep moving forward. Things pile up and don't get resolved. They usually get worse.

How are high school students reaching out for help and accessing resources?

- Ask friends
- Some seek out ways to solve problems that aren't necessarily healthy for them.
 - Self medicating

- Substance use as a way to cope and easier than asking for help.
- Social media
- The only people required to learn about mental health resources are people going to Falcon Block and the students in 9th grade that are required to go to health class.

Challenges

- Not a lack of resources but a lack of knowledge of them.
 - Students aren't using CYC Headspace despite the fact that many of the resources are there. Students only find out about it when they're using it for a formal purpose. They see posters and flyers but it doesn't encourage them to access the Youth Headspace or the resources.
- Not having the language to identify what you're going through.
- Not having a personalized approach.
- No time to go talk to someone you can relate to about how your day is going or how you are really feeling.
- Conversations like this are not being had.
- Bathrooms aren't really safe, they go there to get away from the negative attention in class and end up seeing things like vaping, weed, etc.
- If you have issues with vaping or using substances and get caught, you'll be penalized by the school so getting help for it isn't seen as a legitimate course of action.
- Students feel shame in not knowing how to talk about what they're going through.
- Don't see much social media outreach.
- Most people think that they don't need to remember the resources because they're fine now. They don't realize work and stress coming down the line. When they need it then they don't have it.
- The way information is presented is often boring. Looking at a slideshow isn't interesting. Students will use the opportunity to nap or disengage if they aren't actively engaged in it.

Suggestions

- Based on the Teen Health survey, more needs to be done for middle school students
- The method we deliver the information is important. Giving students a chance to talk and engage built into the learning is crucial.
- Students already on social media, meet them where they are at.
- Older students should be encouraged to talk to their younger peers and raise them up. Momentum could die if people aren't trying to lift up other students.
- Effective outreach needs to be part of the solution, people aren't really reaching out to youth effectively.
- Need to present information about wellness as something fun, interesting, and valuable for youth. Saying that you're going to hear a mental health presentation isn't engaging or encouraging.

If anything was successful, what would things look like, how would they be different one year from today.

- It would look different for every student.
- Asking students what they think of wellness and matching them with what might be helpful. More personalization.
- In school
 - Classrooms should feel more relaxing. Some teachers bring tea or do other things to make the environment more welcoming to students. Current ELA class has a tea station and a comfy corner with comfy places to sit. Middle of the day when you're getting tired, it helps people reset. They get a 5 minute break in the middle of class to help them reset too.
 - More small breaks between classes could be helpful too.

What does a future with good wellness look like to you?

- One where everyone feels listened to and understood. Humans are inherently social and want community. When people feel like they can relate to someone, that's when they feel wellbeing.
- There would be a lot more personalized connections to things. Create time and opportunities for youth to talk to someone they can relate to about how their day is going or how they are really feeling.
- Starting high school was a very different experience and environment than middle school. Incorporating more of the elements students see in high school earlier in middle school (teen health center, welcoming events, Falcon Block, etc).

What are your perspectives on technology?

- Even with the phone ban, students don't really have a break and they aren't encouraged even if they had their phones. Super draining just to be "learning" for 85 minutes straight.
- Some students like the phone ban because everyone participates and it encourages conversations from students who might not be having them otherwise.

Do youth have afterschool spaces where they can go and decompress?

- Some do
- There are solutions outside of the school, not just inside the school.
- Important for students to have options to make meaningful connections outside of schools. Examples:
 - Out of school - Moses Youth Center programs
 - In school - Working on Womanhood, and Becoming a Man
- Afterschool activities are not for everyone
 - Introverted students don't really feel like they have opportunities suited to them.
 - Hard to find peers who feel the way they do.

While there are a lot of resources, young people still don't know about them and take advantage of them. Why do you think that is the case?

- Students don't feel comfortable reaching out and asking for help.

- The taglines and language we're using creates stereotypes about what the resources are and what they do, but they have a bad reputation of being boring,
- Students feel like they already know what it is and don't want it (even if they might).

Falcon Block at CRLS

- Challenges
 - An opportunity, but you have it with people you don't necessarily know very well. Hard to stimulate open conversation when you're with people you don't know or feel comfortable around.
 - Who's creating slideshows? It isn't clear and doesn't feel like it matters.
 - Adults making solutions they think are right without youth input.
 - Students want to use the time to decompress
 - No one would choose it as an option
 - Generalized formats miss the mark when everyone needs something different. Needs a personal connection.
- Suggestions to improve Falcon Block
 - Use more engaging mediums. Examples - a movie rather than a slideshow, activities curated by students.
 - Falcon block seen as a resting period. The perception and purpose of it needs to be changed. Seen as a study block/ free period. They want to use it for their own purposes.
 - Allocating free time, a place to reset, could actually be beneficial to someone's health rather than having something be so open ended or used for such a disconnected set of purposes.
 - Figure out how it can be a way for students to prioritize what's important to them.
 - Try actually getting feedback from students and asking them what Falcon Block should be.
 - Your group that you're with is essentially the same for the entire 4 years of high school. Incorporate the wellness class with 9th grade Falcon Block would be a good way to start things off and set the tone for the future of Falcon Block.

Adjourn 7:15