

**Cambridge Kids' Council Meeting: September 15, 2011 at 6-8PM
Citywide Senior Center, 806 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA**

Present: Mayor David Maher (chair), Jeff Young, Louis DePasquale, Susan Flannery, Bob Haas, Andrea Collymore, Charlotte Avant, Neal Michaels, Humbi Song, Barbara Kibler, Tina Alu, Sam Seidel, Jessica Daniels, Nancy Tauber, Ellen Semonoff, Mary Wong

Absent: Betty Bardige, Sally Benbasset, Ken Reeves, Steve Swanger

Guests: John Clifford, Lee Giannetti, Daniel Ruben, Claude Jacob, John Lindamood, Marjorie Decker, Marc McGovern, Lynne Hall

A. Call to Order

Meeting called to order at 6:17pm by Mary Wong, chairing the meeting in Mayor Maher's absence

1. Welcome & Introductions

Mary Wong is chairing the meeting while the Council awaits the arrival of Mayor David Maher, who is delayed. Mary asks that all present introduce themselves, which they do.

2. News & Announcements

Chair Wong asks if there are any announcements from those present.

Ellen Semonoff announces a resource guide from the Department of Human Services, which is being distributed by the "backpack express" and which will soon be posted online. This guide lists both city-run and community-run programs for youth, indexed by neighborhood and by age of intended beneficiary.

Ellen also mentions Family Literacy Day, an annual program hosted at City Hall and at the Citywide Senior Center, at which an "illustrious array" of City officials will read for children. It will occur on 5 November.

Barbara Kibler announces Area IV Pride Day, coming on Saturday 17 September, and also directs attention to a flyer she had distributed for a collaborative program with the Cambridge Community Center about living with Diabetes.

Chair Wong mentions a neighborhood program from CCTV, for which she has distributed a flyer. She also points out the Cambridge Kids' Council tote bags which have been distributed.

Susan Flannery announces that this summer saw more items checked out from the library by children than any previous summer had seen.

Mayor David Maher, having recently arrived, is now chairing the meeting of the Council.

Mayor Maher adds that the library staff were also working harder than ever as a part of this feat.

B. Public Commentary

Mayor Maher invites the public to comment. The public declines the invitation.

C. Cambridge Public Schools

Engaging Families

Mayor Maher invites Jeff Young, Superintendent of Cambridge Public Schools, to speak.
Jeff Young shares:

There's been an effort citywide for schools to improve their communications with families. I was able to get a grasp on the City's efforts in engagement and outreach from a recent meeting of the Executive Committee of the Kids' Council. At this meeting I told the Executive Committee of our plans to retain Karen Mapp. She's a professor at Harvard's Graduate School of Education and is one of the strongest advocates of family engagement as a means to improving the quality of education. Her most recent work has been working on family engagement for the City of New York. She's also done some work with Cambridge and has had opportunities to get to know the school district.

I've asked her to help us this year on family engagement. We're focusing on improving our academic program this year so that it is ready to meet the challenges of the Innovation Agenda when it goes into effect next year, and this is part of that focus. She began by running a go-minute workshop at the first citywide principals' meeting of the year last week, and this was a valuable training session for the principals. Steve Swanger from the Housing Authority was also able to join us, and we'll be working with the Housing Authority to reach out to families directly rather than waiting for them to come to us.

As for Karen, she worked for the Chicago Public Schools for a while, and emphasized five attributes for success. The one on which she will be focusing with us is "Parent and Community Ties". Among her work is a book entitled, "Beyond the Bakesale", which focuses on how to involve parents in a way that has deeper impact than merely raising funds. Putting these partnerships in place, according to Karen's research as spelled out in this book, has led to higher test scores, more enrollment in higher-level classes, more credits earned, better attendance, better social skills, and higher graduation rates and college attendance rates. She places schools on a continuum, from "fortress" schools which shut parents out, to "come as we call" schools which bring parents in when it's convenient for the school, to "open door" schools which make parents feel welcome, to schools where true partnerships exist among parents and teachers. We hope that all of our schools can become "partnership" schools. I'll also be checking on whether she can address the Council at our next meeting in November.

Mayor Maher asks for comments or questions, though there are none.

Mayor Maher then adds that it will be valuable to have Karen Mapp working with the City and the schools on this matter.

Jessica Daniels, who has read *Beyond the Bakesale* and has worked from it, suggests that Cambridge's rich human services support puts it at an advantage to other cities, as those services which the City provides do not need to be implemented in the schools.

Jeff agrees, and adds that Karen Mapp would argue that family engagement is a means to the end of higher achievement, not an end in itself.

Neal Michaels asks where the ultimate responsibility lies for family engagement, and wonders, if it lies with the schools, how the whole concept gets pulled together.

Jeff replies that consistent expectations have been a challenge throughout the schools in various contexts. He elaborates, noting that priorities are set at the district level, and action is taken at the school level, and the schools themselves have both the family liaisons and the teachers attempting to engage families. He explains that Karen Mapp has been brought in to help at the district level to set the priorities, but concedes that any effective action will have to take place at the school level.

Ellen expresses her excitement over this initiative. She sees value in the opportunity to work with the schools, who, as with the Human Services department, have an interest in touching children's and families' lives, but from a different perspective. She also mentions a recent event which had the goal of letting families know what programs exist.

Bob Haas, remarking on the event Ellen had mentioned, shares the value to the police of being able both to show the community they're available and to hear the stories of those they serve. He also speaks briefly to a program through the police in which they choose a few young girls to empower as a Leadership Corps.

Sam Seidel asks, once the teacher opens the door, if the relationship between parent and teacher is such that the parent is always right. He presumes not, as it is still the teacher's classroom.

Jeff responds that the idea is that both parties, the parent and the teacher, know things about the student that the other doesn't know. By having both collaborate, and having the parent know what's occurring in the classroom, the student has greater opportunity for achievement. He adds that a student has ten hours of non-classroom, non-sleeping time in a day, and if the family can help tie one of those hours into school, it's a good start.

Barbara Kibler recalls her experience as a parent organizer in the Boston schools, stressing the importance of teachers and principals being on-board with family engagement. She adds that Cambridge seems to be achieving this goal.

Jeff cautions that even in Cambridge there is an element of distrust between schools and families, as there is in any district. It is important, he notes, that families not flock into the classroom and take over but instead act as teammates with the teachers. He fears making teachers feel as though their classrooms are being encroached upon.

Barbara responds that it can often feel like encroachment to the teacher.

Jeff agrees, and adds that, in addition to teachers being trained on how best to manage this relationship, parents will have to be trained. Neither the teacher nor the parent is always right.

Marc McGovern mentions, briefly, the dual challenge of getting some parents more involved and encouraging others to take a step back.

Nancy Tauber, speaking to the second half of this challenge, shares that every parent has gone to school, and therefore thinks she knows how the teacher should be doing his job, when in fact it's much different from what many of the parents imagine. As an example, she speaks of a recent situation in which a teacher handed down a consequence to a student for misbehavior, and half the parents found the consequence appropriate, half unconscionable.

Jessica Daniels specifies that the goal isn't to open the door to all sorts of whining parents. It is instead to move forward from the current status quo. As an example, she refers to the High School as a "fortress school", beginning with the fact that no one knows how to get around the building when they first come in. The goal, she reiterates, is not only to make parents feel comfortable coming in to the school, but to open new avenues of engagement between teachers and parents.

Jeff summarizes, stating that bringing the wisdom of Karen Mapp and her colleagues together with the wisdom of the parents and the teachers will come up with ideas that can be tested and refined.

D. Presentation & Discussion

Blue Ribbon Commission

Mayor Maher introduces City Councilor Marjorie Decker and School Committee Member Marc McGovern, who have been chairing a Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Care.

Marjorie begins:

Thank you, Mayor Maher, for calling this Commission. It's great to have chairs from both the City Council and the School Committee. We've been discussing the question of responsibility for children from ages zero to five. The school department is responsible for children once they're in kindergarten, but who is before then? Much of the achievement gap is already in place by the time students begin kindergarten, so this is an important question. We asked ourselves, "If we, both the City and the School Committee, made early childhood care one of our top priorities, what would it look like?". We brought together great minds from around the community to discuss this question.

We started with focus groups of home daycare providers, pediatricians, and parents, and also sent out surveys to parents. Based on the data we gathered, we came to a number of conclusions as to the goals we should adopt. Our working report on this will be coming out in October. In the meantime, we've scheduled a reception for those who have been working in the field for 20 or more years. One thing we've looked at is how to provide mental health support for childcare workers, especially in light of new rules and cuts from the State. We've also looked at how to expand these programs, and at how to get providers access to group health insurance and group liability insurance. We've secured resources for home-to-home-based childcare. We'll take a look at the partnership among the Library, the Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Cambridge Health Alliance, which will provide a model upon which we can build. We'll be talking about a pilot project to support kindergarten teachers. We've set up meetings with the business community and with the universities. We've talked about setting up a public relations campaign about the importance of early childhood care. We're thinking about a Provider Appreciation Day. We're looking at how to make parking easier for parents dropping off and picking up their children. We're wondering how to expand playgrounds around the city. This is a glimpse of the kinds of things we've been thinking about.

Marjorie asks Marc to continue:

First of all, it's fantastic to have a Superintendent who's on board with this. It would be easy for the School Department to just say, "Not our problem until they walk in the door.". We talk about how to close the achievement gap, but we know that when students first get to the schools, the gap already exists. We've been working to come out of this process with some concrete commitments and action items. The Superintendent has made commitments. The City Manager has made commitments.

One thing being talked about with the Innovation Agenda is using the Family Resource Center as more than just the location for the school assignment lottery, but as a location where parents can gather information and support. Eight years ago, when I was first elected to the School Committee, there was a report that was already ten years old about how to build an Early Childhood Support Center. So we're looking about how to make early childhood support part of the revamped Family Resource Center.

We have great early childhood educators in Cambridge. We've often said, "Our early years are great, and we don't need to focus on them.". But we need to build an excellent system, not just excellent individuals. We're starting to rebuild the relationships between the schools and early childhood care providers.

Marc asks Lynne Hall, who also sits on the Blue Ribbon Commission, to continue:

We need to build relationships between the schools and the early-childhood programs. Cambridge is complicated in that there isn't a direct path for a child from a given preschool to a given elementary school. We're running a pilot program with the preschools in Cambridge to build relationships with the elementary schools. Some of the preschool teachers see their students from when they're six months old until they're ready for kindergarten, so building these relationships can provide exciting opportunities. Another facet of our coordination is the o-8 Council, which meets every other month and brings together all sorts of people who interact with children from birth through age 8.

Mayor Maher asks how many children are enrolled in the preschools run by the Department of Human Services.

Ellen Semonoff responds that there are around 125 preschoolers in Cambridge Public Schools (CPS) buildings, 85% of whom move on to CPS for kindergarten.

Lynne adds that, with DHS housing its preschools in CPS buildings, parents often try to keep their children in the same building from preschool through elementary school.

Marc suggests that parents of children in the DHS preschools are aware of CPS elementary schools, but that outreach should be done with private preschools to establish connections with those parents and encourage them to consider CPS for elementary school.

Nancy Tauber returns to the enrollment question, wondering how many three- and four-year-olds there are in the city that 125 are enrolled in DHS preschools.

Lynne responds that there are roughly 1000.

Ellen suggests the number may be slightly lower.

Nancy then wonders, out of those 1000 or slightly under, how many don't end up at CPS.

Lynne responds that this is an area in which they could improve their data collection, adding that the dispersed nature of the system, with 51 licensed centers and countless families not sending their children to preschool, makes it difficult to keep reliable numbers.

Marc adds that an additional challenge is reaching out to those families who do not send their children to preschool, providing his own as an example. He wonders how to engage those families and improve the quality of the care they're providing to their own children.

Barbara Kibler asks what proportion of the children in Cambridge HeadStart move on to CPS for elementary school.

Lynne answers that compiling data from HeadStart might be a good next step, but that the Commission began with focusing on DHS programs.

Marjorie expresses concern for supporting and reaching out to all families, not only those at high risk or with little support, but also those who have access to resources.

Lynne says that accessibility and affordability are two huge obstacles to early childhood care.

Mayor Maher then asks what the waiting list is like for the DHS programs.

Ellen answers that DHS programs have a very long waiting list, and suggests this may be linked to the fact that DHS programs are by far the least-expensive early-childhood options.

Ellen adds that there are subsidies from both the State and the City, and that separate waiting lists are kept for students paying full tuition and for students receiving subsidies.

Mayor Maher asks if the waiting time for those receiving subsidies is longer than for those paying

full tuition.

Ellen responds that it is not really longer.

Marjorie adds that there is also a waitlist for those who want vouchers for other programs. To illuminate the costs involved, she states that for her son, she pays \$1500 per month for a three-day-per-week program, whereas DHS provides its five-day-per-week program for \$900 per month.

Mayor Maher wonders if there has been an increase in providers on account of the lagging economy.

Lynne responds that there has certainly been an increase in unlicensed providers.

Marjorie says that the City needs to figure out how to support the unlicensed providers in addition to the licensed providers, with new regulations, new trainings, and other efforts at support.

Marc then mentions that it is more expensive to provide early-childhood care in Cambridge simply because it is more expensive to live in Cambridge, and he wonders how the City can help make all programs more affordable.

Marjorie responds that the City has, in the past, looked at things like group purchasing of supplies, though it was too complicated legally to be feasible. She wonders on the possibility of creating a scholarship fund for preschool such as that which exists for high school.

Tina Alu suggests providing support and assistance with the business side of providing early-childhood care could be beneficial, and provides as an example the tax preparation assistance program.

Jeff thanks Marc, Marjorie, and their Commission for coming up with a proposal on which he could sign off. He adds that while the focus lately for closing the achievement gap has been the middle grades, the gap begins early, and providing attention to early childhood will enable CPS to begin with a more even base. He also thanks Lynne for her leadership.

Mayor Maher thanks all those involved for their presentation and their hard work. He also reminds the Council of the recent tragedy in Boston, with the child who was left in a preschool van, to point out the enormous liability these early-childhood-care providers are taking on.

E. Review / Adoption of Minutes

May 18, 2011

Mayor Maher asks for a motion to accept the minutes from the previous meeting of the Council.

Action Taken: Susan Flannery moves the adoption of the minutes from the 18 May 2011 meeting of the Kids' Council. Neal Michaels seconds the motion. The motion is adopted unanimously, and the minutes are adopted.

F. Implementation of Strategic Plan

Updates

Mayor Maher asks Mary Wong, Executive Director of the Council, to discuss this topic.

Mary walks the Council through the Indicators/Measures Chart showing the data collected to date. She shows samples of reports (the Cambridge Public Health Bulletin, Report Card-The Well-Being of Children and Youth in Philadelphia, and the Progress Report of the Montgomery County Family and Children First Council of Ohio) as models for the Kids' Council's Status Report on Children and Families.

Mayor Maher suggests that, among the data which various bodies already routinely collect, the phrasing of some questions could be tweaked to provide better data for the Council, and asks about speaking with those who collect the data about this.

Sam Seidel appreciates the positive work on the Strategic Plan, and recalls the discussions from the past about whether there should even be a plan with specific measures and data, saying that it looks as though the Council is making good progress on this front.

Mary adds that Jim Maloney at the School Department has offered to help with the data collection .

Andrea Collymore looks to Item B on Page 1, which is percentage of families receiving books. She suggests that the percentage of families receiving toys should also be investigated, and adds that the School Department has a program in which children are taught with toys pretty much from birth. Ellen offers that this is the Home Visit Program, which brings both toys and books. Andrea lauds this program, as children need to learn how to use their hands, too.

Mayor Maher asks if there are other questions, but there are none.

G. Kids' Council Membership

Youth Representatives

Mayor Maher reminds the Council that there are not currently any youth representatives on the Kids' Council as well as no youth from the Youth Involvement Subcommittee (YIS) are present at the meeting.

Mary adds that the YIS should be in place for the November meeting of the Council. The application deadline for joining the YIS is September 20th.

Mayor Maher asks if youth seeking to return to the YIS need to reapply.

Mary responds that they do need to reapply, but that it's a different application than for those who have not previously served on the Youth Involvement Subcommittee.

Mayor Maher asks if there have been more applicants than available slots.

Mary responds that it's not clear yet for this year since the deadline is September 20th, but last year there were 64 applicants for 16 stipended slots on the Youth Involvement Subcommittee.

Mary also reminds the Council that, while there are 3 positions for youth representatives to the Kids' Council, there are only four applicants for those slots so far, and, by City guidelines, there needs to be at least two applicants for each membership opening to be forwarded to the City Manager for his appointment consideration. She suggests a motion to forward the four applicants to the City Manager as a step in filling two Youth Representative slots on the Council.

Action Taken: Charlotte Avant moves the forwarding of the four candidates interested in serving as Youth Representatives on the Kids' Council to the City Manager. The four candidates are Sara Daniels, Shubham Dhital, Mekides Mezgebu, and Fatima Shields. Susan Flannery seconds this motion. Unanimously, the Kids' Council agrees to forward the four candidates to the City Manager for appointment consideration as members of the Kids' Council.

H. Next Steps

1. Next Kids' Council Meeting: November 17 (6:00–8:00pm)

Mayor Maher reminds the Council that its next meeting is scheduled for 17 November. He adds that he has asked Jeff Young to get Karen Mapp as speaker for the meeting.

Charlotte Avant returns briefly to the relationship between teachers and parents, and suggests that a school's principal can be a key player in this relationship. She recalls a workshop when her daughter was a student, entitled "Building Bridges Instead of Walls". She reiterates the importance of the principal in this process.

Mayor Maher says that there has been fairly high turnover in the principal position in the last six to eight years, and asks Nancy Tauber to confirm.

Nancy responds that there are only two principals in the system currently who have been in their posts for more than five years.

Mayor Maher remembers a time when one would get that position and stay there the rest of his career. Nancy agrees.

Mayor Maher adds that the principals are getting younger and younger, and suggests that one area in which this being negatively felt is in principals' experiences and skills in managing teachers and communicating with parents.

Jessica Daniels asks if the Council has all of its Community Member slots filled.

Mary Wong thinks this is the case. As for other vacancies, she mentions that Dennis Keefe has left his role at the Cambridge Health Alliance and as Public Health Commissioner and Alice Bay has taken over, and there are currently slots open for those representing Youth, Early Childhood, Universities, and Business.

Ellen Semonoff moves that the meeting be adjourned. Nancy Tauber seconds the motion.

The Council adjourns its meeting at 7:40pm.

Meeting Documents: 1) September 15, 2011 Kids' Council meeting agenda; 2) minutes of the Kids' Council meeting on May 18, 2011 3) Cambridge Resource Guide - 2011/2012; 4) Taking Care of You: A time to share with others your successes and challenges in managing diabetes flyer; 5) 9th Annual Area IV Community Pride Day flyer; 6) Join NeighborMedia Cambridge: Become a Citizen Journalist flyer; 7) Profile of Karen L. Mapp; 8) description sheet about the Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Care; 9) Kids' Council Five Outcome Subcommittees: Short List of Indicators and Measures Chart: 9/15/11; 10) Sheet comparing Kids' Council's 5 Outcomes for children success to the Massachusetts United Way's 6 Outcomes for children success; 11) Massachusetts United Way: Ready For Lifelong Success; 12) Cambridge Public Health Bulletin; 13) Report Card-The Well-Being of Children and Youth in Philadelphia; 14) Progress Report of the Montgomery County Family and Children First Council of Ohio.