

Cambridge Human Services Commission  
Minutes of Meeting 11/8/2012  
5:30 – 7:30pm  
Citywide Senior Center  
806 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge

Commissioners present: Lori Likis, Kati LaBraico, Claudia Hill, Rev. Lorraine Thornhill, Christine Elow, Khari Milner, Christopher Hall, Katharine Thomas

Regrets: Nan Stone, Ayse Atasoylu

DHSP staff: Ellen Semonoff, Janice Alger, Jolyon Cowan, Jose Soares (recorder).

Presenters: Lori Likis, Chief Planning Officer for the Cambridge Public Schools (CPS) and Khari Milner, CPS Program Manager for Out of School Time.

Lori Likis provided an update on the CPS's Innovation Agenda, which proposed the development of the Upper Schools program in Cambridge and was officially approved in March 2011. The Innovation Agenda was a citywide effort to develop four Upper Schools for middle grade students. The purpose of this program was essentially to prepare students in grades 6 through 8 for success at the Cambridge Rindge & Latin high school (CRLS) by reducing gaps in education amongst Cambridge's diverse student population, and developing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Prior to the implementation of the Innovation Agenda in September of 2012, middle grade students attended Cambridge's elementary schools, which all ran through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and middle grade curriculums often lacked uniformity and the same high levels of academic rigor. Now, eleven of Cambridge's twelve elementary schools have classes from junior-kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and one, the Amigos School, which is a dual-language immersion model runs through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The four Upper Schools and the Amigos program for middle grade students all have consistent academic programs, which offer a host of academic and enrichment programs

The four Upper Schools are Cambridge Street, Putnam Avenue, Rindge Avenue, and Vassal Lane. Each has its own website. The implementation of the Innovation Agenda means there is now a 6<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum as opposed to each school having its own; everybody receives the same academic program, with the exception of the Amigos, whose curriculum while aligned with the other Upper Schools educates its students using a two-way Spanish/English immersion model. Students within the Upper Schools must now join an Advisory Group, which meets frequently to create a community within a community of peers, and works to foster a positive school atmosphere. Drama is also a new activity this year for all 6<sup>th</sup> graders as is the revised Health Education curriculum, which adds emotional and mental health components. All middle grade students can opt to take either Spanish, or French, and Chinese is offered at the Putnam Ave Upper School. All Upper Schools offer electives and enrichment programs and run newsletters to inform parents of school activities. For instance, each campus has a band or orchestra. There has also been a concerted attempt to expand middle grade students' exposure to different activities including: math, science, history and social science, music, physical education, visual art, astronomy, Spanish/Portuguese language, and Arts.

Students are held to common district wide priority curriculum and work to develop skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that will set high expectations. The Habits of Scholarship philosophy was developed to focus on the outcomes the Upper Schools are striving to produce in Cambridge youth. CPS's Habits of Scholarship are continuously integrated during the academic year. The Habits are:

- Utilizes problem solving and reasoning skills
- Plans, organizes and successfully completes assignments (including homework)
- Collaborates effectively with peers
- Demonstrates creativity in approaching daily and long-term assignments
- Challenges oneself and perseveres through difficulties
- Gathers, evaluates, researches, and uses information effectively

This year the District's goal is to develop student reporting and accountability for both the Habits of Scholarship and the Innovation Agenda as a whole. Standards based report cards have already been institutionalized throughout the system. Parents receive clear, concise information on students' mastery of subjects. Commissioner Kati LaBraico was concerned that progress reports offer less information than previous ones.

Prior to the creation of the Upper Schools this year, there was some concern that there would be a decrease in enrollment from Cambridge Public Schools; however, this year's enrollment figures in grades 6 through 8 show there was only a decrease of 20 students from last year: in academic year 2011-12, enrollment was 1,131 students, and in 2012-13, enrollment is 1,111 students.

Children with Special Education needs are also better integrated into the CPS system. They are placed in inclusive classrooms and no child has to move more than any other in the system. Kids come in to the Upper Schools with very different achievement levels, particularly in math. So 6<sup>th</sup> grade math is co-taught by both a general education teacher and math teacher.

Lori also mentioned a few other new programs including Full Circle, a Cambridge wraparound zone, modeled on the Harlem Children's Zone, that provides a continuum of integrated student and family supports in the Area 4 neighborhood, particularly in the Fletcher Maynard School. Full Circle focuses on increasing readiness for kindergarten. The Baby University's fourth cohort is being run out of the Fletcher Maynard School and the previous three cohorts were run in different neighborhoods around the city. The Cambridge School Department is also planning to open a pre-school at the Fletcher Maynard school in September 2013. Preference will be given to Baby University alumni and siblings of students at the Fletcher Maynard school.

Partnerships are in place with the Cambridge Police Department, the Department of Human Service Programs, the Public Health Department, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education with literacy experts from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and interns working with the Fletcher Maynard community. A number of speakers will present on a series of topics for families. For example at the Fletcher Maynard school annual dinner, Pamela Mason from the Harvard Graduate School of Education will lead a workshop on reading to children. Attendees will get a copy of the book "The Snowy Day."

Lori said that satisfaction with the CPS seems to be high. In last year's CPS Family Survey, which was distributed in various languages, parents were asked to rate their overall experience with the Cambridge Public Schools; 74% of the responses were totally or mostly satisfied. The satisfaction rate is similar to

previous recent years, and significantly higher than in 2007 when 63% of respondents responded being totally or mostly satisfied. Results of the June 2012 survey were passed around at the meeting.

While there have been some issues with the implementation of the Innovation Agenda involving transportation and scheduling, for the most part the Upper School program has been well received. There have been individual stories of more diverse groups of kids connecting, and new communities of engaged teachers. For instance a letter appeared on September 18, 2012 in the Cambridge Chronicle from a grandmother who had sent all her children to Cambridge public schools and her grandchildren now attend. In her letter to the editor, she said that she was now witnessing for the first time her grandchildren attending fully integrated middle schools saying "this is the first time, while waiting for my grandson after school, I see children of all persuasions, cultures and races come through the front door. How awesome it feels to watch children doing what children do -- play with each other, learn with each other, live with each other during their school years."

Khari Milner then presented on the Agenda for Children's Out of School Time (OST) program, and its relationship with the Innovation Agenda. The OST program is a collaboration between the Cambridge Public Schools and the Department of Human Service Programs (DHSP). In 2009 responding to a gap in programs for middle school youth, the City adopted the goal to ensure broad participation of middle school youth in quality OST. The focus of these efforts was the Cambridge Middle School Network (MSN). The MSN focuses on "collaboration, capacity, and service delivery among Cambridge's community of OST providers and schools serving 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders."

In a recent survey of parents, 47% were not aware of the Out of School Time programs. OST staff are looking at this statistic to understand how to better market OST. Similar to the Innovation Agenda's work with the Upper Schools, the focus of the MSN is to increase both access and equity for all OST programs serving middle grade students. The MSN also works to increase awareness of OST activities for both parents and students in the middle grades. In data from the community schools, 6 and 7<sup>th</sup> graders enroll regularly, but there is a drop off in enrollment in grades 8 and 9.

The Cambridge Public Schools found that it could not serve this age group in a silo. Therefore a strategic partnership was formed with DHSP youth centers, sports leagues, Community Schools and community programs to create and coordinate more opportunities for children in grades 6 to 8. Khari Milner and Susan Richards from the DHSP co-direct the Agenda for Children's OST Initiative. They are both well positioned to forge networks in the system from pre-K to grade 12. OST staff have worked with heads of Upper Schools, counselors and faculty to address issues of equity. As in the past, there have been disparities in program resources and staff capability and access to training. The emphasis in reaching underserved middle school parents and students is on having kids try out something new. The curriculum for the OST is research-based and is focused on enrichment activities.

In the spring of 2013, each participant in the OST will have a passport or portfolio to document and acknowledge the different experiences each is exposed to. Participants will create a list of competencies to start with, e. g., communication, critical thinking, and perseverance. There is an OST Resource Guide for providers with a description of the different programs in the various areas of Cambridge.

The next Human Services Commission meeting, is scheduled for December 13.

Meeting adjourned.