

# Kids' Council

## Year-End Report 2013-14

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## INTRODUCTION

The Kids' Council, officially known as the Coordinating Council for Children, Youth and Families was created in 1991. It is chaired by the Mayor, and its members include residents, elected officials, department heads within the City, community and non-profit leaders, business, early childhood, philanthropic, university, and youth representatives. The Council is dedicated to developing policy and program recommendations aimed at improving the quality of life for children, youth and families in the city of Cambridge.

### 2013-14

The Kids' Council agreed to continue to work on "Family Engagement" and develop recommendations to create and support genuine partnerships between families and the organizations and institutions that serve them.

#### Criteria for Choosing an Area of Focus

The Kids' Council developed and agreed upon criteria for choosing an area of focus. They used this list of criteria to figure out what would be the best way for the Council to further their work around family engagement.

1. Utilizes the strengths and resources of the members and Executive Director of the Kids' Council and offers clear ways for them to contribute.
2. Enhances the capacity of the Kids' Council, providers, agencies and networks to continually learn from families and incorporate the voices, the needs and strengths of families with an emphasis on families who historically don't have a voice.
3. Addresses articulated community needs.
4. Builds on existing and already planned initiatives, rather than being duplicative.
5. Aligns with the function and purpose of the Kids' Council as stated in the ordinance.
6. Enhances the ability of all families (with emphasis on families with fewer opportunities for access and participation) to access resources and help providers reach families
7. Benchmarks can be developed to track progress toward desired outcomes and where possible use existing data and information.
8. Recognizes the resources and relationships needed at the onset.
9. Takes something on where we can show progress within a year.
10. Creates opportunities for partnership.
11. Initiative will be visible to the people we are trying to reach.

#### Area of Focus 2013-14

This year the Kids' Council began developing recommendations for ways that **families can more easily access services, supports and information and take advantage of what the city has to offer.**

The Council gathered feedback directly from families and providers in order to make policy and program recommendations that would be most helpful to them.

## Community Engagement Team (CET)

In 2013, the Kids' Council and Community Engagement Team (CET) **gathered feedback from providers and educators** regarding outreach and family engagement through a survey (175 participants) and networking event (125 attendees). Some of the most interesting **highlights** include:

- The top rated engagement strategies incorporated **personal connections and developing strong relationships WITH families**.
- **PARTNERSHIPS** between city, school and community based organizations matter.
- The biggest barrier to engagement is to find the **TIME** to do the work, supervise, coordinate, and evaluate the efforts.
- **Substantive family engagement takes resources** – funding, dedicated and trained staff, support from supervisors, time and energy.
- **Language and translation issues are barriers** to outreach and engagement with families.
- Recruiting **from the community** to reach the community works.
- **Family engagement leads to STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**.

For the **FY14 Budget**, the Kids' Council developed recommendations to enhance the capacity of the CET:

- **Hire two additional outreach workers** and increase current hours to work on special projects;
- **Plan and develop a series of training modules for outreach workers across the city;**
- **Cambridge Public Schools contract with CET** for 832 hours of outreach worker time.

For the **FY15 Budget**, the Kids' Council recommends that the CET maintain a team of 11 outreach workers (with additional funds for special projects), continue work with the Cambridge Public Schools, and pilot the training program for outreach workers across the city.

### \*The Community Engagement Team (CET)

The CET, a multi-agency collaborative, reaches out to under-served Cambridge families and connects them to community events and resources, develops community leaders, and supports agencies in working with a diverse community. CET hires, trains and deploys immigrant and minority outreach workers. The CET outreach workers are members of the community who provide information about community services and activities to a diverse group of Cambridge families.

## CITY-WIDE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Mayor Davis convened a group to discuss the development and implementation of a city-wide policy regarding family engagement. The Kids' Council created a **CITY-WIDE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT POLICY** which was adopted by the Cambridge City Council on November 18, 2013.

WHEREAS: It is a goal of the City Council to see that families are fully engaged in their children's education, health and well-being and the community; and

WHEREAS: One of the strongest predictors of success for children and youth is engaged families; and

WHEREAS: The city's vision of successful family engagement in Cambridge is genuine partnerships grounded in respect between families and the organizations and institutions that serve them; and

WHEREAS: Not all families are equally engaged or have equal access to information, support and services; and

WHEREAS: Over the last year the Coordinating Council for Children Youth and Families (a/k/a Kids' Council) has gathered information through various means and concluded that family engagement is viewed as a priority and providers are interested in collaborating with others who serve families to overcome the barriers to effective family engagement and providers are interested in collaborating with others who serve families to overcome the barriers to effective family engagement; and

WHEREAS: It is the shared responsibility of our community to reduce barriers and create the conditions necessary for families to be engaged; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That it shall be the goal of the City Council to further examine strategies to support families and strengthen relationships and partnerships between families and the organizations and institutions that serve them and develop recommendations; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Council adopts the following goals in support of family engagement. The city government will:

- Strive to welcome all families and encourage their input regarding decisions affecting their children.

- Intentionally continue to build community and relationships between families and with families and work to ensure all families feel included.
- Promote coordination between the city services, schools and community service providers.
- Support training for service providers.
- Assure easy access for families to information, resources and services
- Evaluate the methods of outreach and engagement on a regular basis; and be it further

ORDERED: That the City Manager and the Mayor work with the Kids' Council and its members—including the Department of Human Services, School Department, Police Department, Public Health Department, the Library and community partners—to further the goal of developing effective city-wide family engagement.

## FAMILIES AT THE CENTER

### Kids' Council Area of Focus

The Kids' Council identified the need to **develop recommendations to make it easier for families to access information, services and resources to support their children**; therefore, the **Family Engagement Subcommittee** developed questions to ask families and front line providers in order to gain a better understanding of what would be most helpful to families.

### Interviewees

91 Parents of	129 Providers
All JK-5 Schools	After School Teachers/Directors
All Upper Schools	Preschool Teachers/Directors
Amigos	CPS Teachers/Principals/Family Liaisons/Title 1
CRLS	CEOC
Out-of-District	Agenda for Children Literacy & OST
Charter Schools	DHSP Staff
High School Graduates	Center for Families
Public and Private Preschools	Community School Directors
Infants and Toddlers	CET Outreach Workers
All JK-5 Schools	Literacy Ambassadors
	Pathways
	SafetyNet/Police Officers
	School Nurses

### Interview Questions

#### Questions for Providers

1. What types of services, supports, and information are families requesting on behalf of their children?
2. Who do you go to and/or where do you go when you need information to support the children/youth you serve?
  - What works?
  - What makes it hard?
  - What would make it easier?
3. What can be done to better connect families to the supports and services they need to help their children?

### Questions for Families

1. What types of information and services do you need to support your children?
2. Who do you go to and/or where do you go to find out about activities, supports, and services for your children?
  - a. What works?
  - b. What makes it hard?
  - c. What would make it easier?
3. What can be done to better connect you to the supports you need to help your children?

### **Families at the Center**

Based on surveys and interviews with Cambridge families and providers to understand the barriers families must overcome to access information, resources and services, and the combined efforts of Kids' Council members to brainstorm solutions, the Kids' Council Family Engagement Subcommittee proposes the following initiative, "**Families at the Center**" This initiative aims to increase families' access to information, resources and services within the City of Cambridge by:

#### Expand on the Door 2 Door Campaign

Work with Matt Nelson (Community Relations, Cambridge Police Department), the Cambridge Police Department and an indentified working group on the planning and implementation phases for the expansion of the Door 2 Door Campaign. The goal for the Door 2 Door expansion is to engage the disengaged and build capacity among residents in a targeted neighborhood (Newtowne Court/Washington Elms). During the summer months we will continue to survey community members on appropriate and convenient ways they want to be engaged. The expansion will consist of but be not be limited to: Door 2 Door events; community conversations; and other neighborhood events. Working with stakeholders and service providers, the working group we will determine how to measure success, and what questions need to be asked to generate the answers we need.

#### Develop a Plan for a Centralized Resource Website/Portal

Work with Code for America's Boston Brigade volunteer, Ethan Bagley, to guide a group of stakeholders through a process to develop a constituent-driven services system that is accessible through platforms they choose with the goal of making sure families and those who support them can find what they are looking for when they are looking for it. The working group will develop a clear vision and outline necessary elements to include in order to define the scope of work and estimate the cost of initial implementation.

#### Explore Models for Information Hub(s)

Perform a comprehensive planning process aimed at creating an Information Hub or a network of Information Hubs, providing a clear point of entry for families to access the array of services and supports they will need. By intentionally building off of what we already have, we can service families more effectively and efficiently by meeting them where they are.

## **Kids' Council/Healthy Children's Task Force Collaboration**

### **RE: ACEs and Trauma**

#### **Background**

The ACEs/Trauma subcommittee of the Healthy Children Task Force (HCTF) has been studying the effects of trauma and its effect on children's learning and behavior. With evidence of high levels of adverse childhood events experienced by youth in Cambridge, the HCTF and the Cambridge Kids' Council held two forums focusing on current practices in place within the city to identify youth experiencing adversity and trauma and promote resiliency through individual, social, and environmental strategies. Out of this came several recommendations, many of which are being carried out by the Cambridge Health Alliance, Department of Human Service (DHSP), Agenda for Children, Cambridge Public Schools (CPS), the HCTF and the Kids' Council.

#### **Proposal**

The subcommittee propose that all Cambridge public and private organizations that work with children and youth commit to providing their staff with professional development on trauma and resiliency. Aligning this training would allow all staff who work with youth to respond in consistent ways and set up trauma-informed practices across settings.

#### **Action Taken to Date**

- The Agenda for Children and DHSP have led the way by creating a 6-hour training for youth workers. Over 100 out of school time staff have taken this CEU-providing course.
- CPS has created and implemented a 1.5 hour *Introduction to Trauma Informed Classroom Practices* workshop that has been offered to the staff of several schools.
- In order to provide consistent messages to all people who work with youth, CPS staff has met with the developer of the Agenda for Children/DHSP course to discuss merging their courses so that CPS staff can get a deeper understanding of trauma and resiliency. A 10 hour course for CPS staff is being created that would provide 1 Masters Plus/Increment credit for school department staff.



## **YOUTH INVOLVEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE (YIS)**

The Youth Involvement Subcommittee (YIS) is the youth civic engagement component of the Cambridge Kids' Council. YIS is comprised of a diverse group of young people ages 14 to 18 and is youth led and adult supported. Each year, the YIS works on projects related to the Kids' Council's goals and topics that are of interest to the young people.

Aligned with the Kids' Council's vision of Family Engagement, this year the YIS members decided to split up into two groups in order to address the Opportunity to Learn Gap in both the upper schools and high school in Cambridge. Elements of the project included distributing information essential to academic achievement through social media, videos, posters, and workshops. The content highlights the importance of taking advantage of the resources and services Cambridge has to offer, as well as emphasizing the value of self-advocacy. Their goal was to provide other young people with the tools needed to succeed in middle school, high school and beyond.

Over the course of the year, the Youth Involvement Subcommittee has also made meaningful partnerships with MSN (Middle School Network), Youth Action Corps (of Transition House), Cambridge Health Alliance, Work Force, RAY (Raising All Youth), CRLS (through their partnership with Greta Hardina, Family Liaison). These collaborations have helped to grow the YIS presence and made their work this year richer and more far reaching.

In addition, the Youth Involvement Subcommittee sent a delegation of 13 youth to the National League of Cities Conference to represent our city and to support youth participation and networking on a national level. YIS was also able to secure a scholarship to attend the Massachusetts Women's Conference and make connections with other youth groups across the state of Massachusetts.

*Please "like" the Cambridge Youth Subcommittee on Facebook.*

### **YIS Middle School Subgroup**

The primary goal of the Middle School Subgroup was to work on narrowing the Opportunity to Learn Gap by preparing middle school students for success in high school. We decided to work towards our goal through a media campaign on Facebook and a series of workshops at youth centers.

Before this year, the Cambridge Youth Involvement Subcommittee's Facebook page was an underutilized resource for our group. We expanded our Facebook page in order to reach more members of the Cambridge community, including middle school students and their families. One Facebook initiative we took was to introduce ourselves through Get to Know YIS, a series of questions answered by YIS members each week. In addition, we posted links to interesting articles

about education and resources at the high school, so that students can feel better informed. Because middle school students prefer information presented in the form of pictures and videos, we decided to unveil a new campaign through those types of media. We posted pictures to interest middle school students, accompanied by advice about high school. We also devoted many meetings to filming one another answering questions about high school, and posted the videos we made to our Facebook page. Our posts on Facebook regularly reached dozens of viewers, and many posts, including our videos and advice about high school, reached hundreds. Over the past year, our Facebook presence has grown and extended our message to more people.

We decided to host a series of workshops with middle school students at various youth centers around Cambridge, because we believe that being in the same room with middle school students, having honest discussions and answering questions would help middle school students be prepared and informed for their transition to high school. We began by emailing every youth center in Cambridge to see if they would be interested in having us run a few workshops. At the same time, we started planning interactive workshops that included icebreakers, activities, debriefs, advice from us (real life high school students) and Q & A sessions. We wanted the workshops to focus on developing important skills (including decision making, responsibility, not giving into peer pressure, advocating for oneself, study and socializing skills), share the benefit of certain attitudes (i.e. trying new things, staying and remaining optimistic, academic motivation) and inform middle school students of the opportunities and resources that can be taken advantage of to make high school and life after a huge success.

We would like to keep getting feedback on the Facebook page and workshops so that we can keep improving our project and hopefully close the Opportunity to Learn Gap.

### **YIS High School Subgroup**

Our first goal was to help students build relationships with their teachers, so that students can be in charge of their success and feel confident in their academic abilities. The first step in addressing the need for students to communicate more with their teachers was choosing a target group of students. We decided to focus on sophomores because they are still in an early stage in their high school careers but are not experiencing all of the other influences and programs that freshmen do. Next, we created a survey to get a sense of what sophomore teachers thought, if anything, about how students advocate and communicate with them. The goal was that through this survey, we would have a better sense of the issue we were hoping to address.

To begin to address the issue, we decided to create a way to help students spark conversations with their teachers. We created prompt cards that had suggestions on how to start talking to teachers in various situations: to check in, to improve and to prepare for an upcoming test. The prompt cards took two forms: a large laminated poster to hang in classrooms and a small quarter-size page for

students to take with them. We then went to the classrooms of our target teachers, sophomore classrooms, and asked for them to hand them out to their students. We revisited these teachers multiple times to both make sure our prompt cards were in the hands of students and to see if they helped students begin conversations with teachers.

In addition to supporting students in starting conversations with their teachers, we wanted to raise awareness about all of the resources available to students at CRLS. Our first step was identifying what those resources were. Then, we did some research to find all of the necessary contact information for each resource. In order to make all of this information accessible we created small flyers with all of the contact and location information. We have since handed these out to parents at school events and will be putting them in report cards to send home to families to encourage students to take advantage of the supports that exist at CRLS.

Our final step was getting feedback, both from teachers and from students, to see if our efforts were effective. Although the resource flyers are a continuing initiative, we received mostly positive feedback from teachers who handed up the prompt cards and hung the laminated versions in their rooms.

## **NEXT STEPS FOR THE KIDS' COUNCIL**

- Follow up with the “Families at the Center” Initiative
  - Expand on the Door 2 Door campaign
  - Develop a Plan for a Centralized Resource Website/Portal
  - Explore Models for Information Hub(s)
  
- Continue collaboration with the Community Engagement Team
  
- Continue collaboration with the Healthy Children Task Force and the work around ACEs and impact of trauma on our children, youth and families.
  
- Youth Involvement Subcommittee
  - Continue to focus on the Opportunity to Learn Gap
  - Keep a strong YIS and KC partnership
  - Change name from Youth Involvement Subcommittee (YIS) to Cambridge Youth Council (CYC)
  
- Schedule presentations for 2014-13 Kids' Council meetings
  - Updates from CET
  - Updates from YIS
  - ACES and Trauma follow-up (Healthy Children Task Force)