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From entrance into the program in the eighth grade, participants' school attendance and performance are tracked to help them make the most of their opportunities. Work Force staff play a role similar to external guidance counselors. At Cambridge Rindge and Latin School 54% of the students live in public or Section 8 housing. For the Cambridge Public Schools as a whole the figure is 38%. The school dropout rate among the 130 – 140 participants is zero.

From the time kids join the Work Force they are encouraged to think of themselves as college material and the work they are doing as college prep. Literacy development plays a role, as do college scholarships of $750 - $1000 to help with books. Also, four $1,000 merit scholarships plus one community leadership award are also given with the potential of being renewed for four years. Juniors are taken on out-of-state college trips including public, private and historically Black schools in New York, Chicago, Pennsylvania and other locations.

The program works closely with the schools in a complementary fashion. All Work Force staff and Cambridge public school teachers are trained in literacy. There is a summer literacy camp for eighth and ninth grade students.

In late 2007 – early 2008 the Housing Authority utilized a consulting firm to conduct a survey of Work Force graduates 1999-2007. The survey was designed to look at the post-high school experiences of program participants over time and to solicit their opinions on how to improve the program. While the 54 respondents were very favorable about the program's impact, it is important to note that alumni have struggled with adjustment issues in college, including family crises at home and finances. Some highlights of this study include:

- 94% went on to college, a college preparatory school or a training program
- 91% are now working or in school
- 66% of those who graduated more than four years ago no longer live in public housing
- 37% completed college within four years, compared to a national average of 60%
- 20% cited academic difficulties
- 41% spoke of financial problems in college
- 41% had a family or personal situation that kept them away from their studies
- 35% felt they had not gotten enough "one on one" assistance in the first post-high school program they entered
- 47% stated that they would have been more likely to succeed in their post- high school educational program if Work Force staff had been available to help them
- 88% plan to continue their education.

Although 90% of the graduates reported some contact with The Work Force staff since graduation, efforts are underway to develop a more structured way of staying in regular contact with the kids and of providing some support through a network of alumni. Sometimes it is a matter of providing help for "getting kids to launch." Steve is seeking funds for part-time staff for the alumni initiative to help get it set up and folded into current programming.

Ayse Atasoylu asked about the characteristics of successful kids. Steve remarked that some students do have learning disabilities or mental illness. At one time 33% of Work Force participants had special-education plans, in some cases reflecting linguistic and other difficulties faced by immigrants rather than true learning problems. Academic deficits, however, are not the biggest problem. The culture in college is often so different, especially for students accustomed to the multicultural atmosphere in the Cambridge schools. Some have left historically Black schools and white schools, feeling they were just too contrary to their earlier experiences.

The experiences of Haitian immigrant families are very different from those of African American families who have been here for generations. In its early days the Work Force had a very small number of white students, a few Latino students mostly from Central America and many Black students. Now in some years one half of the program participants are Haitian. Work Force staff sometimes ponder the question of where "generational" African-American kids have gone. For example, Haitians constitute 28% of the residents in Jefferson Park but 70% of the Work Force program participants. There is a similar pattern in other developments. Currently 45% of all Work Force participants are Haitian. The staff are trying to do outreach specifically to African-Americans and Latinos, with some success with the latter group.

At the CDBG public hearing last February Bob Hurlbut spoke about the Cambridge Community Foundation's immigrant initiative, but Steve is concerned with the lack of program participation by non-immigrants. The Community Engagement Team, a very successful network of early childhood outreach workers, brings families of young children to literacy related programs. They also educate service providers about the needs and background of specific groups such as Africans from Ethiopia in Somalia and East Asians. Many programs are finding that they need to work with a more specific focus to engage African Americans. Some service providers are observing that a fair number of African American families have moved away from Cambridge, although they may come back for church and for sports. There is sometimes a tension between African Americans and immigrant Blacks, some of whom have prejudices about African-Americans. There has been some success in reaching out to African-American individuals. There may be a tipping point in the numbers of immigrants in a program at which native born residents feel "excluded" and discouraged from participating.

Because the U.S. Census categorizes both African Americans who have lived here for generations and more recent Black immigrants simply as "Black"-, it can be frustrating to try to differentiate among groups in a meaningful way. Other entities then tend to follow the Census classifications in collecting their own data.

The Community Engagement Team has proposed a Policy Analysis Exercise to be carried out by students from the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, researching the situation through several methods. One would involve examining the program participation pattern through redacted (names masked) birth records to see whether parents of Black children participating in some local programs are U.S. born or immigrants. There would be discussions with community leaders in the generational African American community, followed by data collection through means such as focus groups or surveys.

Ayse suggested that individuals who have been successfully recruited as participants should be asked about barriers and should be utilized to recruit others. Steve indicated that Policy Analysis Exercise with the Kennedy School focus groups with community leaders among these groups would implement this idea.

Marion Darlington Hope asked whether it would be possible to tease out differences between the Section 8 versus the public housing tenants. Perhaps the Section 8 tenants are more likely to be African-American and the public housing tenants are more likely to be immigrants, especially in Cambridge. Many African-Americans are also able to move up to home ownership. Also, individuals whose first language is English, including African-Americans, may have more job opportunities than non-native speakers and therefore not feel as much of a need for the Work Force.

Steve replied that for families with children, two thirds reside in family public housing developments and one third in Section 8 units. For individuals who are not in family households two thirds reside in Section 8 units and one third in public housing. Some Commissioners remarked that there are now many more whites living in their neighborhoods than there were years ago.

Paulina Mauras asks what the Housing Authority would consider to be an African-American. She noted her daughter's Puerto Rican and Haitian heritage combination, for example.

Ayse remarked that individuals' identification of their own racial or demographic classifications may depend on how many generations back they are contemplating.

Ellen said that this topic was both troubling and interesting. On the one hand upward mobility, whether combined with either remaining in Cambridge or moving away, would be considered positive for many. At the same time we don't want to miss any particular groups in our outreach activities. Ellen also noted that the parent controls how the child is described on the Census, which now includes multiracial options.

Khari Milner asked whether the proposed study would be able to draw any conclusions leading to new strategies. Steve said that is the hope, and that both the issues of people who are no longer present in Cambridge and of those who are here but their needs are not well known should be examined.

Paulina asked about programmatic limitations based on funder requirements. She described how as she has moved up from living in public housing to moderately priced housing and is preparing now to become a first-time home buyer, her child is eligible for less and less. School buses do not come to her neighborhood (Cambridgeside) although there are several families with children in her building.

Steve remarked that for years he has wanted to be able to expand the Work Force beyond public and Section 8 housing.

Marian observed that people can need a service but not want it. There are so many more opportunities in Cambridge than just the Work Force, for example. Immigrants may feel closer to home in public housing. There might be a need for varied strategies to reach out to different groups. Paulina asked whether Steve could find out what some of the competing programs are.

Ellen remarked that it's not only about access to the Work Force. While some people may not need a given program others might want the services if they were structured in a certain way or if either the outreach or the service itself particularly appeals to them. In addition to language, cultural differences may affect how a particular group interacts with services. Steve cited as one example of this the discomfort many Haitian families experience in dealing directly with schools.

Khari said people may feel encouragement or discouragement to participate in some settings based on historical attitudes and experiences, especially with schools. In high schools everywhere in the United States the dominant teen culture is African American. Kids of many backgrounds want to dress a certain way and listen to certain music considered "Black.". People from some soccer playing countries can't understand why their kids want to play basketball like African-Americans.

Ellen said she wanted to make sure that people understand that for the study birth certificates have been revised to mask names.

Marian remarked that the results in Steve's study are better than one might think. Only 38% of students who start at the University of Massachusetts finish their degrees there, and students who transfer to another school are likely to take longer than four years to finish. At Lesley University, where she now teaches, Marian says 60% of the first-generation college goers are lost. Students who live closer to home often have the pull of family responsibilities which may interfere with their education at times. Steve said that Work Force kids are often caught in this phenomenon. The student wants to go away to school but the parents need him or her to stay close to help with various situations.

The question was raised of the extent to which the School Department tracks what happens to kids that leave.

Steve said sometimes the financial aid situation is heartbreaking. Schools offer kids a good package to get them in and then start pulling back, not providing as much over time. Neither the kids nor the parents are experienced in negotiating financial aid. Kati LaBraico remarked that these kids have had staff support while they were in the Work Force but don't have this help later.

Khari spoke about involving Kam Maali, the Work Force Program Director, with various afterschool programs. Steve said that Kam is very interested in this although most afterschool programs are for groups younger than Work Force participants.

Lori Likis said she liked the way the Work Force has changed to meet changing needs. She mentioned the Posse scholarships where students are prepared to enter colleges in small groups, and receive ongoing support including mentoring by graduate students, faculty or members of the administration in their colleges and universities.

Steve remarked that once the Work Force developed its literacy initiative they raised staff salaries to the level of beginning public-school teachers. This creates a fund-raising burden, currently met with 12 funding sources, but it is well worth it to be able to recruit and retain good staff with bachelors' or even masters' degrees.

Paulina spoke about how she had been driven by a burning insight. At 17 she had an infant and many pressing family issues and she was attending Suffolk University as a commuter. She got a tutor through the Margaret Fuller House and that really enabled her to go back to school that second-year. That tutor told Paulina that as the daughter of a low-income family in public housing, she had already exceeded the odds by making it into college. Paulina found motivational the tutor's further challenge for her to beat the statistics by succeeding in college to offer her own child better odds in the long run. She would be willing to come back and talk to Work Force kids.

Upcoming Meetings and Topics

There was a reminder that the October 15 commission meeting would feature Gail Enman and Larry Keane from CASPAR. We will reserve time at that meeting to talk about what else we would like to do over coming months. Commissioners can also e-mail Ellen with any particular thoughts they may have about this. **(Please note that the October 15 meeting has been canceled to allow Commissioners to participate in a World Café with City Councillors. CASPAR has been rescheduled for November 19.)**

Ayse asked whether we would begin reviewing programs in February as in past years. Ellen said that if there are significant changes with the new U.S. President we could delay this process slightly. Marian remarked that changes in the administration would probably not be evident until the next year.

Ellen distributed the DHSP *Resource Guide*, noting that it has been beefed up with the addition of School Department program listings and is widely available in Cambridge.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.