

Cambridge Kids' Council Meeting  
February 12, 2009

Present: Mayor Denise Simmons, Tina Alu, Ken Reeves, Robert Haas, Ellen Semonoff, , Susan Flannery, Bridget Rodriguez, Marc McGovern, Carolyn Turk, Sam Seidel, Donna Cabral, Steve Swanger, Samuel Gebru, Andrea Kramer, Benjamin Likis, Mary Wong

**A. Call to Order/Announcements**

Mayor calls the meeting to order at 6:15p.m.

Ken Reeves notes that Boston is looking to replicate the Harlem Children's Zone. Sam Seidel reports that the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on 0-18 year olds is focusing on middle school children. Tina Alu announces that the CEOC (Cambridge Economic Oppotuniyu Committee) offers tax preparation services. Samuel Gebru notes that the Richard Allen Lecture Series on February 16 at 9a.m. will have Charles Ogletree as featured speaker. The topic of the event will be "What the Obama Presidency Means for America"; Gebru will be a panelist in the event.

**B. Review/Adoption of Minutes**

*Action Taken: Sam Seidel motions to adopt the Kids' Council Meeting Minutes for November 20, 2008 and the Council Retreat on January 15, 2009. The motion is seconded by Donna Cabral and unanimously adopted by the Council members present.*

**C. Public Commentary**

---None---

**D. Strategic Planning**

Amoretta asks that the Council reflect on last month's retreat.

Both Mayor Simmons and Ken Reeves state that Amoretta did a great job and made good use of Council time. Reeves says it is important to note those departments and organizations working for youth, and understand where/how the Council fits.

Reeves continues that he has inquired of Ellen Semonoff to determine where her department (Human Services) gets their mission, and should their mission be determined by the Kids' Council.

Amoretta says we are not only recognizing where groups are exercising their powers and to what end, but how to establish a unified vision. She suggests groups are picking up different parts of the work, but working to achieve the same goal, but without knowing that goal, it is hard to see this. Amoretta continues that the small groups from the retreat allowed Council members to talk about their perceptions. She notes there was concern around the vocation

attainment of youth post high school graduation. She states that there needs to be a nuanced picture because Council members' suggestion that community members are doing extremely well might mask real problems in that same or other communities. Lastly, Amoretta notes that, again, this data was just Council members' perceptions and hard data would be good to either confirm or refute these perceptions.

The main activities that Council members suggested the Council move forward on are: 1) establishing a common vision for kids/big picture goals; 2) coordinating policy; 3) collecting and sharing data; 4) advocating for families; 5) reviewing budgets for children; prioritizing funding, being able to prioritize programs and funding; 6) identifying additional resources; and 7) begin to problem solve in meetings.

Amoretta says the other question was how to operate as a Council: Be focused, goal-oriented, have guidelines for solving problems, open communication, lead policy making body for children and families, maximize expertise on the Council, and create unity (this was the most popular suggestion from the retreat).

Amoretta shows slide on how change can happen through this body. Slide includes those at the table: community members, Mayor, business reps, students, school committee members, university partnerships. These committed people need a shared unified vision with access to information, and must have authority to define policy and fit in with other bodies. Council members said they want to: Establish common goals, collect data, make recommendations, share information about policy and programs, improve program coordination, improve community relations, and be able to track our progress.

Amoretta asks if anything is missing. Reeves says he has been trying to think how to form a web of services for children; he says he would say that 50% of the population is middle class, and if you drill down on the other 50%, we need to be much more intentional on who we assist and why. Some community members do not need as much as others. Reeves says that Swanger works with many children in low-income housing, who we should always work with. We need more intentionality and to put more thought into who do we serve first. He adds that he is hopeful that the City will work for youth to not only graduate high school but follow through to college. Noting the Harlem Children's Zone College Success Program, Reeves suggests that the Cambridge School Volunteers might be encouraged to organize a pilot effort and this would not cost anything.

Amoretta notes that this goes back to establishing a common goal; it needs to have clear parameters.

Amoretta says that during the retreat, the small working groups came together and defined two strategic priorities: 1) Each year, publish a youth report card. This document will serve not only to set goals, but to measure the City's progress in achieving these goals; and 2) Have the Kids' Council be the lead champion that helps to plan and think about the safety net for children and families.

Amoretta further explains the proposed report; she asked Council members to look to their packets for "2004 Report Card" from Philadelphia. Amoretta points out that Philadelphia looks at key indicators to arrive at their ratings and looked at specific communities divided by zip code, and created teams to focus on specific areas.

Amoretta says that in her experience it is important to have goals that require many sectors and groups to work together.

Amoretta turns the discussion over to Mayor Simmons. The Mayor says that the importance of the report card is to be a "guiding light" as to where we want to put our emphasis and programs. It holds us to accountability and transparency, and also helps to translate data into action. It measures and tracks the Council as the coordinating body. This is also an important time to capitalize on programs such as the Harlem Children's Zone. Mayor Simmons says she would vote for both recommendations from the working group because they complement each other. She points out that this will be a great place for the City to work with universities.

Samuel Gebru agrees that he also supports both recommendations.

*Because Carolyn Turk is leaving early, Turk casts an early vote for both recommendations.*

Tina Alu says that data is important and it drives what we do. Nick Bruce adds that it is important to have quantifiable data, and important to determine who collects that data. The Mayor says that the data collection will be determined by the Council.

Amoretta adds that the Council would inform the stories through the data. The Council would determine trends and then make recommendations based on the information. She notes a lot of that data is already there and the Council should just build on it.

Mayor Simmons notes that the Commission on the Status of Women just released a report and it was used as a tool to qualify for grants.

Nick suggests that a website or online forum might be appropriate. This would give an on-going access to data.

The Mayor continues that the report card would be a great way to get our message and work out to the community. Upon a question from Sam Seidel, the Mayor responds that the report card would be released biennially. This would give the Council time to work on information coming from that report.

Seidel asks if the report card would become the main focus of the Council. The Mayor responds that it would not, and that is why it would be a great place for universities to get involved.

Ben Likis asks for clarity on the differences between the report card and Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) model. The Mayor responds that the work would mirror programs of the HCZ and the report card would inform that work and other work that is done in the City.

The Mayor suggests and recommends that the Council adopt both recommendations.

Semonoff says that if we are successful in getting a university partner it would be good for the community to identify things we think matter. She says there is a lot we can do with a report card. Says she can imagine it creating a full agenda.

Marc McGovern agrees that the report card would be an important thing for the Council to put out.

***Action Taken: Andrea Kramer puts forth a motion that the Kids' Council create a report card/assessment to assess the well being of children and families in Cambridge. The motion is seconded by Marc McGovern and unanimously adopted by the Council members present.***

The Mayor suggests that the Council put forth a motion to maintain the HCZ conversation and approach it at another time.

***Action Taken: Steven Swanger puts forth a motion that the Kids' Council continues to explore, pursue and express our interest in the Harlem Children's Zone. The motion is seconded by Samuel Gebru and unanimously adopted by Council members present.***

The Mayor extends thanks to Amoretta for her work with the Council.

Mary Wong explains that there is a working group already working with Amoretta to develop the strategic plan and various issues are brought back to the Council; so there will not be a separate working group now until the start of the report card.

#### **E. Kids' Council FY2010 Budget**

Mayor Simmons introduces Wong and asks the Council to refer to their packets. Wong explains that enclosed is the Kids' Council budget overview; she explains that the first page is the Kids' Council Budget which outlines operations, youth initiative (YIS budget) some funds also given to the Center for Families, since that initiative's grant funds were diminishing.

Definitions:

SW: salary wages

OOM: general funds

T&T: training & travel

The last two pages outline the Agenda for Children's Literacy and the Out-of-School Time Initiatives, and other funds for the Center for Families. This is all City funds; many of these initiatives also have grant funds.

Semonoff notes that there has been a 2% salary increase based on the increased cost of living. She says she is working with other departments to see how they can cut costs. She also adds there has been a cut from the grant for the Center for Families.

Wong says there will be a vote to pass the budget to the City Manager during the March meeting.

#### **F. Next Steps**

The next Kids' Council Meeting in March will be held at the Senior Center. Seidel and Gebru note that it is the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of both Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin. Ben adds that it is also Dubois' birthday and the birth of the NAACP.

McGovern adds that it is also his Grandmother's 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

***Action Taken: Ellen Semonoff motions to adjourn the Kids' Council meeting. The motion is seconded by Susan Flannery. Vote passes on affirmative votes from members present.***

Meeting is concluded at 7:45p.m.