

KIDS' COUNCIL MEETING

October 15, 2009
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Agenda

- A. Call to Order / Announcements E. Denise Simmons (6:00)
• Introductions
- B. Review / Adoption of Minutes Mary Wong (6:15)
• May 28, 2009
- C. Public Commentary E. Denise Simmons (6:20)
- D. Strategic Plan FY2010 – FY2012 E. Denise Simmons (6:25)
1. Presentation & Discussion Robert D. Behn
• *“Why Measure Performance?
Different Purposes Require Different Measures”*
2. Implementation Updates Mary Wong (7:25)
- E. Kids' Council Membership E. Denise Simmons (7:30)
• Vote on Youth Representatives
7 Candidates: Abuchi Agu, Siham Elazi, Hichem Hadjeres,
Cheyenne Jones, Pasang Lhamo, Moses Michel, Robel Phillipos
- F. Break-out to 5 Outcome Subcommittees Mary Wong (7:40)
• Meet & Greet
• Exchange contact information
• Propose 2 dates for 1 hour meeting with Julie Wilson
(M/T/W @ 4:30 or 5:00pm)
- G. Next Steps E. Denise Simmons (7:55)
• **Outcome Subcommittee Meetings: October – December 2009**
• **Community Input: January 2010**
• ***Kids' Council Retreat: February 25, 2010***

Cambridge Kids' Council Meeting
15 October 2009

Present: Mayor E. Denise Simmons, Bridget Rodriguez, Neal Michaels, Susan Flannery, Billy Andre, Louis DePasquale, Andrea Collymore, Robert Haas, Betty Bardige, Ellen Semonoff, Tina Alu, Steve Swanger, Sam Seidel, Kenneth Reeves, Craig Kelley, Mary Wong

Guests: Robert D. Behn, Geoff Marietta, members of the Youth Involvement Subcommittee, Outcome Subcommittee Co-chairs, students of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government

A. Call to Order / Announcements

Mayor Simmons calls the meeting to order at 6:10 pm.

Mayor Simmons instructs Mary Wong to check for the presence of a quorum, expresses her hope that everyone had a great summer, and then introduces herself and asks of all others present to do the same. Claude Jacobs notes he is attending for Dennis Keefe. A quorum is present.

B. Review / Adoption of Minutes

Action Taken: Steve Swanger motions to adopt the minutes from the Cambridge Kids' Council meeting of 28 May 2009. The motion is seconded by Sam Seidel and unanimously adopted by the council members present.

C. Public Commentary

None

D. Strategic Plan FY2010--FY2012

1. Presentation and Discussion

Mayor Simmons introduces Robert D. Behn, faculty chair of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government's (HKS) executive education program, "Driving Government Performance: Leadership Strategies that Produce Results", author of "Why Measure Performance? Different Purposes Require Different Measures", and Red Sox fan, for which Mayor Simmons offers her condolences. She mentions the presentation is a part of the council's partnership with HKS, and thanks Bob for coming.

Bob begins by making sure everyone has a copy of "Why Measure Performance..." and states that he will present a summary of the slides from his presentation to Mayor Simmons, for which she thanks him.

Bob focuses on the fact that measurements are not inherently useful, and their value lies in how they are utilized. Specifically, he speaks of measurements being useful for the following goals of an organization: Evaluate, Control, Budget, Motivate, Promote, Celebrate, Learn, and Improve. He notes the main goal is improvement, and the other goals are useful to the extent that they foster improvement.

For each goal, Bob notes, there is a question being asked, characteristics of measures that can help answer those questions, and a context to keep in mind when evaluating the measures. According to Bob, these are as follows:

For the goal of evaluation, the question is, “How are we doing?”. An appropriate measure would show what inputs achieved what outcomes, and what externalities also affected the outcomes. One context useful in evaluation is knowledge of the desired result, so that the data from the measure chosen can be compared to it.

For control, the question being asked is, “How do I get people to do what I want them to do?”. What can be controlled are inputs, so when choosing a measure, one should keep in mind how inputs can be controlled and which inputs should be regulated, while remembering the context of what is wanted. Bob cites speeding ticket quotas as an example of a measure used for control.

With budget, the question is, “How do I spend the money?”. An appropriate measure will likely be a ratio, putting output over input to generate data on efficiency. Important contexts for measurement in this goal are a standard of efficiency as well as an acceptable level of spending.

For motivation, a measure can be used to encourage others not under one’s direct control to do what one wants them to do. An appropriate measure for this purpose would be some sort of performance target that keeps track of individual success. The context to keep in mind is that the target should be both significant and reasonable.

When promoting, the question is, “How do we convince the world we’re doing a good job?”. A measure used for promotion needs to be something citizens can understand. As an example, Bob speaks of the RMV. A measure that a citizen would use to evaluate the RMV would be how long she waited in line, or how his picture came out. While these measures have nothing to do with the core goals of the RMV, they are important in promoting the mission of the RMV to the public.

As for celebration, an appropriate measure would measure something the organization deems worthy of celebration, which, again, may or may not relate directly to the organization’s core goals.

For learning, the questions are, “What’s working? What’s not working?”. Any measure used for this goal needs to provide data that can be broken down to show what’s doing well and what isn’t. Bob mentions the bar chart as an example of how to do this. Important contexts to keep in mind include one’s expectation of how others should behave and whether an unexpected development could be detected.

The goal of improvement uses all the other goals to answer the question, “What do we do differently than before?”. A measure used for this goal should speak to what’s going on inside an organization, or help in figuring out what a change could bring about.

Bob closes his presentation by sharing with the council two futile searches: “The One Best Way” and “The One Best Measure”.

Mayor Simmons thanks Bob for his presentation and opens the floor to questions.

A visitor in the gallery says she isn’t sure what Bob has meant by “in” and “out” of the “black box”. Bob explains that we cannot know what every component of an organization is doing all the time (what is happening “in” the “black box”) and that a chosen measure could, in fact, change behavior within the black box. So it’s important to choose measures that help improve behavior.

Betty Bardige notes that the inputs and outputs of the Kids’ Council involve a wide range of agencies and organizations. Do the range of formal and informal collaborations or various chains of command matter, she wonders, when choosing helpful measures? Bob answers that it does matter in terms of a measure’s ability to change behavior, but that a visible enough measure will be effective regardless of who is doing the measuring. He cites, as an example, the Rating of the States that is done by Governor’s Magazine. Despite the fact that no voter pays attention to this, and no governor reports to Governor’s Magazine, it is still an effective measure at promoting change because the governors themselves care how they relate to one another. Betty clarifies her question by asking how we measure our effectiveness and the value of measures. Bob responds that the question becomes one of ‘who is responsible?’ and ‘how do we figure out if they did a good job’.

Sam Seidel modifies the thought, by pointing out that the goals of the Kids’ Council are not something simple and quantifiable, such as selling more cans of Coca-Cola. He wonders what the proper measurement is and notes that if it were simple, it would have been discovered by now.

As an example, Sam mentions the Kids’ Council’s goal of lowering the achievement gap before children enter Kindergarten. Betty provides the possibility of measuring the success of this goal using third-grade reading scores, but Bob points out there are other elements in the reading scores than the level of the achievement gap before Kindergarten. Betty responds that a more fine-grained test could be used, but notes this would be expensive. Bob cites the example of an Oregon statewide benchmark of “children entering Kindergarten ready to learn.” To measure this, Bob says, they ask the teachers.

Bob asks the Council what it would want to know in September of a Kindergarten year to determine if the achievement gap has been closed. Betty points out that the goal is to move the lower levels of achievement up rather than to move the higher levels down. Bob points out there needs to be a way of knowing the levels both of the current gap, as a starting point, and of the gap in the future. Bob speculates vocabulary would be one way to measure the achievement gap, and further speculates the achievement gap is a racial issue. Carolyn Turk wonders what the achievement gap is, which Bob sees as a more fundamental question than those with which he can be of assistance.

Bob wonders what sets apart those of the kindergartners about whom the Council worries. Carolyn lists off low income, race, special needs, and ESL as the characteristics of the 30% or so of kids about whom the Council is concerned. Bob points out, then, that we need only test these 30%, and not the other 70%, and that with this smaller number, we could take the time to find out their vocabulary. Sam says we have decent measures of student achievement, but don't know how to use that data to design and implement a plan for success. Bob then returns to the point that it's first important to know what success would be.

Ellen Semonoff points out that even if there were some test that measured student achievement as they entered kindergarten, the Council doesn't have the authority to implement it, as that authority belongs to the School Committee. She asks how this would come into play. Bob responds that it should be part of the considerations all along, and that the Council would either need to convince the School Committee this was important or find some other way to measure achievement. He mentions that some organizations collect data as part of their day-to-day operations, and some don't. The Council, he argues, either needs to collect the data or convince someone else to do it. He presents New York City's measurement of street cleanliness, which they can go around and measure themselves without relying on outside help, as a contrast to the Council's question of achievement, which requires measuring other people.

A visitor named Cheyenne asks how we know when we've succeeded enough. Bob responds that it is necessary to know the target level. If one child isn't ready for kindergarten, is that failure? Is the goal 95%? Cheyenne asks, if the goal is 95%, do we then leave the other 5% behind? Bob points out that it makes a difference whether those 5% are way behind or are right at the margin, and that it's important, therefore, to be able to disaggregate the data. Bob points to MCAS results as an example of where this perhaps isn't being done effectively. In his example, the parents in Lexington would be upset if 95% of Lexington students were passing the MCAS while 98% of Wellesley students were doing the same, and that this could cause the superintendent in Lexington to shift resources away from other, more important things to getting those three percentage points. This, says Bob, is why it's important for an organization to have clearly-defined goals and a strong sense of its focus.

Bridget Rodriguez mentions that the Council does know what it wants as a group and that it has its goals set out as stated in the Council's Strategic Plan. She asks Bob to say a little more about theories of action and logic models. Bob presents the following logic model: if teachers teach, students learn. He notes there are many steps in this model, and they can't be thought through without an ultimate goal in mind. Any measure, Bob notes, is going to be imperfect, and at some point one needs to be chosen.

Claude Jacob notes there are different dimensions to kids. He wonders how we determine which ones to look at. Bob says it's not important if one child is better than another, but it is important that they're both good in their own ways. So the measurement chosen, Bob says, must be able to record this. Claude wonders how we

identify which data points would help paint the best picture of success. Bob says it's important to define success before figuring out how to go about measuring it. He presents the example of a student who drops out of high school but spends all his time at the library, and ponders whether or not this is a success.

Sam brings up World War I, in which the Germans and the French had the same data but reached very different conclusions. 20 years later, they got to test these conclusions. Sam wonders how we can know if our conclusions are accurate without an opportunity to test them. Bob says this is a good example. He closes by saying we know the goal, but need to operationalize it.

Mayor Simmons thanks Bob for leading the good discussion. She mentions this was the easy part, and the hard part is doing something about it. With that, she moves to the implementation update.

2. Implementation Updates

Mary Wong brings the Council up to speed from April when the Strategic Plan was adopted. She says that during the summer, Mayor Simmons met with Julie Wilson to discuss how HKS can assist with implementation. There is a course at HKS focusing on the Strategic Plan, and each student in the course has been assigned to a subcommittee of the Council. Mary goes on to say that Mayor Simmons held a meeting with department heads to discuss which of the five outcome subcommittee would be most pertinent to each department. They decided the departments should work with the outcome-based subcommittees as follows:

- 1 - Children are Ready for School: Library
- 2 - Children are Healthy and Live in Safe Communities: Public Health
- 3 - Children and Youth Succeed in School and are Prepared to Work: School Department
- 4 - Children and Youth are Engaged in Enriching Activities and Civic Life: Human Services
- 5 - Children and Youth Live in Stable, Self-Sufficient Supportive Families: Police

Mary mentions it is important to have representation on each committee both from within and without the city structure, and points to the handout of subcommittee membership. She says the HKS students have selected their subcommittees, and reminds the Council that the last fifteen minutes of the meeting are for sharing contact information and setting up subcommittee meetings. She also shares that Julie Wilson will be meeting with each subcommittee to give guidance on development of indicators pertinent to the outcomes. She mentions a partnership with the United Way, and that they are looking to Cambridge as a model for how to guide other communities in their statewide action plans.

Bridget Rodriguez reminds the Council that the next step is subcommittee meetings with Julie Wilson, and that the five goals all require collaboration among agencies. She introduces Geoff Marietta, a PhD candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education,

who has volunteered time to help the Council explore grant opportunities for supporting this planning. Bridget thanks Geoff for the work he has done and will do.

Mary points out that the list of subcommittee memberships is not finite, and that each subcommittee should be filled out with members of the community before meeting with Julie Wilson. She then introduces the co-chairs of the subcommittees:

- 1: Daryl Mark and Donna Cabral for Outcome #1, neither of whom are in attendance
- 2: Claude Jacob and Neil Michaels for Outcome #2
- 3: Carolyn Turk and Steve Swanger for Outcome #3
- 4: Susan Richards and Billy Andre for Outcome #4
- 5: Christina Giacobbe, Leonard DiPietro, and Tina Alu for Outcome #5

Mary thanks all of the subcommittee co-chairs.

E. Kids' Council Membership

Mayor Simmons says there are three vacant seats for Youth Representatives to the Council and seven candidates for the seats.

Action Taken: Neal Michaels motions to put the names of the seven candidates forward to the City Manager for appointment as Kids' Council Members. Steve Swanger seconds, and the motion passes by unanimous vote.

F. Break-out to 5 Outcome Subcommittees

There is unanimous agreement to skip this item and return to it at the end of the meeting.

G. Next Steps

Mary Wong states the subcommittees will meet to identify indicators, hopefully to have them by January, to present at the February retreat of the Council so that the Council can decide what benchmarks to include in its biennial publication of a Status Report on the State of Cambridge Children and Families. Mary asks Bridget Rodriguez and Susan Flannery to help with Outcome #1 Subcommittee today as its co-chairs are not present.

Kenneth Reeves apologizes for not having been present in time for public comments. Ken wants everyone to know a middle school report is available. Ken also wants everyone to know there was a forum at Microsoft about the College Success program. Ken also points out that the Youth and Family Summit of the National League of Cities met in Boston this past week, that Mayor Simmons was on a panel, and that Ken attended on Monday. Lastly, he reminds the Council that Jeff Canada will be in Cambridge on 23 October and Hubie Jones will be leading a session.

Mayor Simmons asks those present to take note of the upcoming meetings and that, from now until January, the Council will be meeting by subcommittee. She thanks the Council for the opportunity to join with this enjoyable and productive work.

Meeting adjourns to subcommittees at 7:40 pm.