

Kids' Council Meeting Minutes
November 20, 2008
6:00-8:00pm

Present: Denise Simmons, Kenneth Reeves, Sam Seidel, Ellen Semonoff, Donna Cabral, Betty Bardige, Louis DePasquale, Neal Michaels, Samuel Gebru, Andrea Collymore, Humbi Song, Benjamin Likis, Tina Alu, Carolyn Turk, Steven Boyan (for Robert Haas), Claude Jacob (for Dennis Keefe), Mary Wong,

A. Call to Order/Announcements

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

B. Review & Adopt Minutes

Action Taken: Neal Michaels motions to adopt the Kids' Council Meeting Minutes for October 16, 2008. The motion is seconded by Louis DePasquale and unanimously adopted by Council members present.

C. Public Commentary

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D. Strategic Planning

Amoretta Morris refers to the three guiding questions on the strategic outline that she asked Council members to ponder at the last meeting. Morris defines strategic planning as a long-term planning process that considers the objectives of an organization and the resources used in achieving those objectives. There will be a survey data collection that will inform the January 15th Council retreat and the meeting time will be extended from 4-8pm. Strategic planning will be finalized at the March Council meeting.

Mary Wong adds that staff of initiatives and subcommittees' summaries will be included in the data collection. Morris asks the Council's thoughts on the process, and what they would like to achieve.

Andrea Collymore says many immigrants in Cambridge are not aware of the Kids' Council. She suggests that the Council can better inform the public, with focus on newer immigrant groups. Donna Cabral adds that she had never heard of the Council and has lived in Cambridge for 25 years.

Ken Reeves states that he has been through many retreats and that he wants the Council to define where it goes and that the retreat can help. He also asks if working through a governmental body is more effective than working through a grassroots approach. He adds it is important to realize that a strategic plan is flexible and that the Council act as an umbrella for all children related issues. That will need PR but the Council does not want to spend money on PR.

John Clifford adds that many at the CRLS have not heard of the Council, making it more difficult to recruit.

Samuel Gebru says that he would like to see more policies that provide direct opportunities for youth advancement created at the Council and more budget accountability.

Elizabeth Assefa suggests more action as a result of Council discussions.

Sam Seidel suggests some thinking on how we best use the Council to move in the direction we want to go.

Louis Depasquale suggests an evaluation process to monitor and see if we go off-track.

Mayor Simmons notes that the Youth Involvement Subcommittee was a great direction for the Council.

Samuel agrees and adds that he wishes more subcommittee members would attend and are clear of their charge.

Mayor Simmons welcomes new members to the Council: Donna Cabral, Tina Alu and Ben Likis.

E. Presentation & Discussion on: “*Multicultural Mental Health: Immigrant Children*”

Margarita Alegria notes that her agency, the Center for Multicultural Mental Health Research, has been working on a project for three years at two Cambridge schools. Alegria says there are a large number of mental health issues in the high school and substance abuse rates are increasing. These problems are not considered systematic problems within the school system. Schools call parents only with problems. Schools are also not prepared to deal with a large number of immigrants. There is no screening for stress and trauma—childhood trauma is the number one indicator for school dropout. Additionally, neighborhood violence is related to lower academic achievement; minority children are more likely to be in schools with high turnover rates. Schools are also not prepared for ESL (English as Second Language) speakers. Many ESL speakers have higher rates of separation and often face adjustment stressors. Immigrant children that come into school after 4th grade have an extremely difficult time with ESL.

Reeves note that this data is national data and not representative of Cambridge. He says he believes that approximately 98% of African-American males graduate high school in Cambridge. Alegria asks how Cambridge calculates this data; he states that the data was

taken starting from the 1st grade. Carolyn Turk responds that there are some calculations that begin at kindergarten, but notes that they refer to state calculations starting from the 9th grade. Nick Bruce notes that a diploma is not the only measurement of success. Addisalem Agegnehu agrees adding that many of these high school graduates do not go onto college. Elizabeth Asefa continues that although students graduate, their knowledge base could be lower. Alegria suggests a closer analysis of immigrant kids and says that she witnessed that there is a lot to be desired in mental health services.

Alegria says that minorities are less likely to take Advanced Placement (AP) courses at school. Additionally school failure is closely tied to mental health. She notes that the services available in school make a big difference, for example: ways to screen for mental health afflictions; ways to support parents and children to acclimate.

When looking at Cambridge in particular, Alegria found it was hard for immigrant youth to find support unless they were already involved in a special program, like special education. Alegria looked at youth with the most absences and poor grades, also teachers, and found that those who came to the United States later struggled much more. Some kids were more than five grades behind their peers. Kids are matriculating to high school with drastically different skill sets. One action item by the teachers at the elementary schools was to invite parents to come into the classroom and tell their immigration stories, accompanied by a cultural dinner. Alegria notes it was difficult to define legal from illegal immigrants because they did not wish to be identified. Alegria says Cambridge teachers are amazing; they work hard and even stay late and come to school on Saturdays. Claude Jacob asks if there is a comparison of students and their parents and possible generational clashes. Alegria responds that there was no specific study done, but that once immigrant parents arrive, they usually do well, but their mental health deteriorates quickly. The neighborhood's reception and amount of services offered make a difference. Cabral agrees and says that mental health issues are becoming more prevalent. She says it is hard to get families to consider mental health issues.

Alegria continues that teachers adjusted curriculum to help students catch up and this also makes a big difference. Alegria states that the teachers were really optimistic and worked hard to define ways to support their students.

Nick asks if there is a difference in solutions between minority and immigrant students. Alegria responds that they looked at the system versus the individual, but notes that language is the biggest separating factor. Additionally, most immigrant students need to work to help support their families.

Betty Bardige asks if there is data on those in the *Amigos* and *OLA* programs, and their graduation rates. Turk responds that it fluctuates. Reeves asks Turk about the presence of culturally appropriate mental health providers. Turk says that this is something we need to look at, but notes that there is the Cambridge Health Alliance. Alegria says that school authority figures only know where to send kids who are in dire needs of services—there is nothing specific for immigrant students.

Nick asks if there is an ideal model? Alegria responds that training other students and giving them the skills to refer other students would be ideal. There should also be an integration program for immigrant families. Sam Seidel asks, in cases of trauma, do you need to tailor services depending on the culture of the student. Alegria says not necessarily. The provider just needs to be culturally sensitive.

Mayor Simmons thanked Dr. Alegria for an informative presentation and discussion.

F. Membership

Action Taken: Louis DePasquale moves that the Kids' Council appoint Andrea Collymore to the Cambridge Kids' Council Executive Committee. Neal Michaels seconds the motion and it is unanimously adopted by the Council members present.

Mary Wong notes that the City Manager has appointed all candidates the Council recommended to him in October; she notes three of those candidates are present. Reeves asks that the City Manager make the appointment of the City Council members to the Kids' Council official. Mayor Simmons will connect with the City Manager on the matter.

G. Report on Friends of the Cambridge Kids' Council

Neal Michaels says that the account was set up as a non-profit for fundraising purpose and there has been no formal filing because there has been no fundraising.

Mayor Simmons says the role of the "Friends" should be better defined through the strategic planning.

Donna Cabral notes she is very impressed with the Council.

F. Next Steps

Mayor Simmons asks the group to prepare for the upcoming January strategic planning retreat. The duration of the retreat will be four hours.

Meeting concluded at 8:16p.m.