

EDUCATION March 26 and April 1, 2003

Introduction

The city administrative staff and elected officials and the representatives from Harvard, MIT and Lesley University agreed that the Cambridge public school system is in crisis. The public does not have confidence in the schools. The universities are seeing the concern about the quality of the schools negatively impact the choices that graduate students and faculty make about where they want to study and work. While there are pockets of high performance, overall academic achievement of students in the system is low. Cambridge spends a much larger amount of money per student than most other cities and towns, but does not achieve the educational results one might expect from such expenditures.

The universities all have many individual activities in the schools, but they are frustrated by their inability to have a systemic impact on the schools. The existing relationships among school personnel and the universities are multi-tiered. Individual teachers have come to university faculty or staff for assistance, and then over the years those relationships have blossomed into wonderful programs and partnerships. There are positive aspects to the many layers of relationships. The school superintendent cannot be the sole contact; and the "hands-on," empirical development of teaching tools and programs can lead to amazing results. However, the lack of an overarching partnership structure it can also exacerbate the uneven achievement levels and get in the way of systemic impact on the educational system.

All agreed that the focus of the committee in the area of education should be on finding answers to the following question: How do we better utilize the expertise, capacities and resource of the universities to improve public pre-K-12 education, and how can the City Council support these activities?

Possible Activities

- University involvement in Superintendent search and selection
 - Universities host reception for new Superintendent
 - Establish infrastructure/protocol for Universities' entry into and participation with the system
 - Universities as a source of ongoing resources and support
- Resources available (based on previous participation in the public schools, areas of expertise, and interest:
- MIT: improving science education (teacher and student focus)
 - Harvard: Ed school: relevant research, professional development, museums as learning resource, community responsiveness
 - Lesley: teacher preparation and professional development
- Other possible areas of support

Ways To Work Productively Together

- Management expertise and research on mergers
- Development and Definition of Role for the Universities in improving the school system
- Definition of a positive and productive role for the council for improving the schools in light of the primary role of the school committee
- Definition of Procedures and/or organizational structure for productive University participation in the schools system (contact person/structure) The superintendent cannot be the sole contact, too busy

Dilemmas

- Fragmentation of the school system
- The relationships with the school systems and the universities are multi-tiered
- Multitude of educational organizations also asking for university support
- Well-known university experts are not always the best resources for local efforts

UNIVERSITY RELATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING WITH SCHOOL COMMITTEE May 30, 2003

Introduction

Significant Factors Effecting Student Achievement in the Cambridge Public Schools

- Big difference in readiness of children who enter the system
- Media portraying public schools as “bad”
- All data is known, no secrets
- Restructuring of the High School has been destabilizing and challenged teacher morale
- Fewer middle class kids in the system
- money not the answer
- people are impatient, and school reform is slow
- no curriculum coordinators for several years (except in science)
- new superintendent selected with a unanimous vote
- budget difficulties
- institutions have traditionally provided fun isolated activities to support learning, which can be distracting in the current full classroom schedule
- unequal leadership in school

What Can We Do?

- Smaller task force with Superintendent (reasonable number of people, building on the history of the Cambridge Partnership. (Regular meetings)
 - Universities and Institutions should invite new Superintendent for welcome, conversation and convey their readiness to act.
 - Identify what has been successful; hold onto the hard earned success to date.
 - Balance individual activities and systemic support.
 - Each Institution brings strengths which need a unifying vision in order to be effective.
 - Principals need to participate in a school by school process.
 - In each building develop a vision and build a community of learning.
 - All need to align around the priorities of the system, match expertise, identify targets, monitor progress with results.
 - Need to help classroom teachers meet objectives.
 - Match activities of the universities and institutions to the teacher's needs and efforts.
 - Develop a team approach to change.
 - Establish learning pods.
 - Involve the President of the Union.
 - The institutions and Universities have enormous content knowledge and are willing to support efforts.
- Some initial thoughts.....

School Committee: check on micromanagement; support whole integrated system

New Superintendent: establish lines of authority between principals and curriculum coordinators; provide management, communication, and coordination.

MIT: provide content knowledge in science for professional development

Harvard: connect professional development to the system

Lesley: Develop vision and work in depth with individual schools.

City Council: Support programs for families with particular attention to linguistic minorities and preschool programs.

City of Cambridge

UNIVERSITY RELATIONS

In City Council June 23, 2003

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Councillor David P. Maher, Chair
Vice Mayor Henrietta Davis, Vice Chair
Councillor Brian Murphy
Councillor E. Denise Simmons
Councillor Timothy J. Toomey

The University Relations Committee held a facilitated public working meeting on May 30, 2003, beginning at 1:15 P.M. in the Museum of Science for the purpose of discussing with the School Committee, university and Museum of Science representatives how the universities and other educational institutions can contribute to the improvement of public pre-K-12 education.

Present at the meeting were Councillor David P. Maher, Chair of the Committee, Vice Mayor Henrietta Davis, Councillor Brian Murphy, Mayor Michael Sullivan, Katherine Rafferty, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office, Deputy City Clerk Donna Lopez, and Elaine McGrath, Cambridge City Clerk's Office. The following members of the Cambridge School Committee were also present: Alan Price, Alice Turkel and Nancy Walser. On behalf of the universities, the following representatives attended: for Harvard University, Mary Power, Senior Director of Community Relations for Harvard University, Mary Ann Jarvis, Associate Director of Community Relations, and Peggy Kemp, Graduate School of Education; for Lesley University, William Dandridge and Paul Karoff; for MIT, Rachel Jellinek and Paul Parravano. Present at the meeting from the Museum of Science were the Director and President Yannis Miaoulis, Ken Spritz, Vice President for Advancement, and Cary Sneider. Two members of the Harvard Crimson newspaper were also in attendance: Claire Pasternack and Jessica Rubin-Wills.

Councillor Maher opened the meeting and explained the purpose, and then introduced and thanked Dr. Miaoulis for sponsoring the meeting at the Museum of Science (Museum), and invited him to speak. Dr. Miaoulis described his background as Dean of the School of Engineering at Tufts and his experience working with public schools for 15 years. According to Dr. Miaoulis, the Museum has two initiatives underway that are relevant to the discussion: an active effort to work with teachers across the state on formal science curriculum through "distance learning", with the Cambridge schools a priority, and an effort to align Museum exhibits and programs with learning standards, so that schools can customize their Museum activities to fit their lessons.

Councillor Maher noted that he had served on the School Committee for eight years. As a Councillor, he was taken aback with the strained relationship, and the lack of fluid dialogue between the City Council and the universities. To improve the situation, the Council initiated the University Relations Committee, which he chairs. There have

been 18 months of meetings facilitated by Ms. Miller. Initially these were planning meetings for the City Council open to the public, to prioritize issues. The universities were not invited to these first meetings, in order to allow the Council freedom to discuss the issues among themselves; later Harvard, MIT and Lesley were asked to attend.

Councillor Maher outlined the Committee's priority issues as: (1) housing, (2) the environment, (3) education, (4) fiscal issues, and (5) planning and development. The Committee decided to start its discussions with the less controversial issues, such as the environment, on which the universities are leaders and the city and universities agree, and education, where the universities have expertise to contribute to public education. According to Councillor Maher, at this week's budget meetings, there was interest in improving public education by using local resources. He noted that it is important to include the School Committee in this educational effort. Introducing the facilitator, Ms. Miller, Councillor Maher pointed out that she has worked with the city as a consultant for six years on goal setting. Her background includes five years as a town councillor in Watertown. Councillor Maher commended her for her help in moving the university relations process forward, and stated that the committee could not have done its work without her.

Ms. Miller's perspective is that there are lots of willing players on the issue of university relations, especially on the topic of schools, but they don't know what the game is. According to her, this is a good problem to have. Regarding this specific meeting, her caveat was that it is an initial meeting and will not resolve all the issues. Her proposed agenda covered the following topics:

- The current situation
- Significant factors affecting the situation of Cambridge schools
- What can we do to help?
- Reflections and next steps

Pointing out that there are lots of people involved, with different agendas and complex issues, she asked the participants to be as candid as possible.

Mr. Sneider asked about the background to this meeting, and Ms. Miller provided a page of notes about the March 26 and April 1, 2003 meetings of the committee on education (**Attachment A**).

Ms. Turkel stated that the notice for this meeting was her first clue about the work of the Committee. She asked for a summary of the activities so far and said that she considered it a problem that the City Council has gotten this far in the process without informing the School Committee. Councillor Maher responded that this was a good point and outlined the work of the Committee, and how it got to this point. Starting as a dialogue in the City Council about the universities, with a focus on what these huge entities were giving back to the city, and a particular focus on PILOT (payments in lieu of taxes) money, the issue evolved to a dialogue with the universities. The universities indicated that they were willing to do more in Cambridge, but that this might not take the form of payments. The focus shifted to their areas of expertise, particularly education.

When the universities were asked why they did not do more in this area, they responded that they were willing, but no one had asked. According to Councillor Maher, without a coordinated effort, university/city initiatives will not happen. He noted the 1991 study of university relations and its recommendations; based on that study, the universities file an annual report to the Planning Board. As useful as that report is, it does not quite address the current relations and the changes that people want. Councillor Maher wants a better framework for the discussion. Linking this history to the current meeting, Councillor Murphy added that the Committee discussions brought up the need for School Committee participation, as the Committee focused on the topic of education, and notice then included the School Committee. Councillor Maher suggested that one next step might be to have a joint City Council-School Committee group.

Ms. Walser noted that the City has just hired a new Superintendent of Schools with an excellent track record of working with universities. She also pointed out that members of the universities sit on the school board, and that the School Committee considers it a priority to work with the universities.

Mayor Sullivan added that the hiring of the superintendent was discussed at the last meeting of the Committee. The city purposely made the presence of the universities part of its pitch in the hiring process, with the universities present at the hiring lunches.

Councillor Maher stated that the relationship of the city and the universities depends in part on who the Mayor is; this office has given the relation priority, but what the School Committee and City Council want is continuity. Councillor Maher especially wants the Council to facilitate the process of getting everybody on the same page.

Mr. Parravano believes that improved communication is at the core of the issue. Efforts like the elementary school Science Fair are an opportunity for all the parties to come together; the universities like elected officials to attend their events. They understand that not everyone on the School Committee and the Council can come, and often the Mayor is the focal point. There are only rare opportunities for the universities to share with the whole School Committee and Council the breadth and depth of the university programs; there are also not many chances for everyone to sit down and brainstorm efforts and goals. Even if all the activities have not affected school achievement, the universities are still proud of their efforts.

Ms. Turkel commented that she does not see an overall effect on school achievement despite the efforts and good working relations of individuals in the schools and universities; these will not make the impact that the School Committee wants to see. What has to be done does not have to happen at all schools; what she is interested in is how to make meaningful connections between universities and schools so as to turn around the schools.

Mr. Parravano said that this was a good point. While he commended the efforts of the School Department in arranging for school-university collaborations, he thinks that rather than making efforts individually, the group should try to maximize school benefits

rather than concentrating on individual parents and students. He acknowledges that coordinating and managing such efforts properly is not easy.

Ms. Power agreed with Mr. Parravano on coordination and communication as priorities. According to Ms. Power, there are already many activities in place, but much more can be done. The question is how to find the next bigger step to build on the success of the many efforts already underway, so as to achieve impact on school achievement. This requires more coordination.

Ms. Miller pointed out that one advantage is the overlap between the School Committee and Council members - 4 of the 5 members of the University Relations committee have School Committee experience.

According to Mr. Price, the next step is to make the transition from individual tactical intervention in the schools to a coordinated strategy. This is going on at the same time that the universities' PILOT payments are also a focus of town-gown efforts.

Ms. Miller then summarized the key points so far in the discussion:

- The presence of a new School Superintendent who has experience with universities
- The need for more communication and coordination in order to make the best use of everyone's experience
- The presence of strong individual programs at the schools
- Identification of the next step to improve overall school achievement

Mr. Sneider remarked that the Museum of Science has coordinated with the School Superintendent, for example, to leverage private money for professional development. While there are contacts many times during the year, the Museum has not sat down with the university relations group to determine the measures of success for the schools and how to work to achieve them. He emphasized that the Museum is open to focusing on Cambridge schools.

Mr. Dandridge pointed out that there have been successful efforts in the schools so far. One next step might be to identify the 2 or 3 most critical issues to tackle; if the group can only do 2 or 3 things, what would they want to be accountable for in the next year?

Mayor Sullivan noted that it has been a rough year and a half for the schools, and with a new superintendent, and 3 or 4 different answers to the question of priorities, moving ahead is a challenge. All of the elements interlock. There are the issues of the curriculum, the achievement gap, new leadership in September with the unanimous support of the School Committee. The city is in a unique position to move forward, and to decide whether there will be the "confederation of schools" identified in the Spence Report or something better. He is concerned that we are destroying ourselves as a

country with the achievement gap. According to the Mayor, we need to teach new skills in the schools.

Ms. Turkel raised the issue of a self-feeding public perception: that university and middle-class families in Cambridge avoid public schools because they believe that the schools are underachieving, which in turn contributes to problems in the system. The irony, according to Ms. Turkel, is that Cambridge schools have improved over the last 10 years while the perception of them has worsened. Regarding prioritization of school goals, she believes that it is important to balance what the School Department can offer with outside resources. For example, even if you didn't have science education as a priority, it would be foolish to ignore resources in the city. Her number one priority is reading, because the literacy preparedness of kids entering the system makes an enormous difference to their performance. Ms. Turkel believes that we have the ability to turn around the public schools, but that the perception of them as the "school system of last resort" must be turned around quickly.

Ms. Walser pointed out that there will be a specific answer on school priorities within 90 days. This is the deadline for delivering priorities to the new Superintendent. The Superintendent will then approach the institutions with the priorities. With the consolidation of the schools, principals have an elevated position. They are part of the Superintendent's cabinet now, and they will participate in the discussions and be held accountable by the Superintendent in the future on school goals.

According to Mr. Dandridge, identifying priorities is a necessary road map to play to institutional strengths; in the process, not everyone has to be at the table in the same way.

Councillor Maher agreed with Ms. Turkel on the "perception" problem. The perception of poor public schools in Cambridge came up in the University Relations Committee as a drawback to recruitment of university staff. Ms. Turkel noted the difference in her own children's experience in Cambridge schools. When her daughter was in elementary public school ten years or so ago, most of the kids they knew were also in public school. The opposite is true for her son in those grades now-most of his peers are in private schools or leaving the city.

Mr. Sneider asked what made the difference in the public perception of Cambridge schools. Ms. Turkel identified the problems with MCAS achievement and the media criticism of public schools; people believe that there are no "safe" public schools. Ms. Walser noted that Cambridge has expanded three schools where the middle class is "closed out". Mayor Sullivan also commented that there are no secrets now about problems in the schools. He also noted that consequences of years of poor education are appearing now, e.g., low reading levels in high school. There are also more kids, and the school population overall is poorer; in effect, there is no middle class in the schools.

Mr. Parravano characterized public perception as complicated. He thought that literacy was a major goal of the schools in the last few years, so he wonders what's new.

What is needed is regular joint meetings about help for the schools. At Harvard, President Summers has received a letter from a resident asking him to solve the problems with the schools with a check. Mr. Parravano considers this approach far off the answer. Solving the problems is not just about mouthing goals, and even the statistics of the schools don't tell the whole story.

Addressing the issue of public perception of the schools, Councillor Maher stated that the instability in the system and uncertainty about various plans did not help. Such instability affects teacher morale and cause confusion. Ms. Turkel agreed that changes in the school system have not been handled well. Councillor Maher asserted that until the School Committee and City Council champion the schools and have their own confidence lifted, they cannot "sell" the public schools. The Mayor added that the past six years of cheerleading the schools does not achieve the goals; what's needed is a good product. Ms. Walser emphasized that while people may be impatient for change, school reform is slow. According to her, there has not been enough recognition of this process, and that has created unrealistic expectations.

Mayor Sullivan stated the question is whether we have a vision for the schools. The community believes that the schools are not good. He cited the maxim "Reality is a crutch for those who can't handle perception."

According to Ms. Jarvis, one area for improvement is the use of curriculum coordinators; there have been no curriculum coordinators for years in most areas. Both the core curriculum and the coordinator program could help school achievement.

Councillor Murphy asserted that the most significant factor in moving forward with the schools is the unanimous appointment of a new Superintendent. There is a great opportunity to fashion the contract on priorities in 90 days, to create the expectation of bringing in the universities to help, and to give direction to the Superintendent on the use of university resources.

Councillor Maher pointed out that the universities have stepped up to the plate in the past on educational issues. Even though there is information on their activities, the public still asks what they do for the city. He suggested that the universities need some publicity in the form of a "hit list" that clearly identifies their achievements. Especially in a tight city budget, it is important to tap university resources.

The issue, according to Councillor Murphy, is not about programs, but about outcomes, and the need to understand cause and effect according to tangible achievements in the schools.

Ms. Turkel sounded a note of caution, that classroom teachers have trouble delivering everything people want. For example, doing drug education takes time away from other educational programs, including unstructured educational time for teachers. According to Ms. Turkel, a professional development program with university connections can focus on this need to develop teachers and curriculum. Ms. Power

considers this a very important point, which leads back to Ms. Jarvis' concern about the need for coordinators. The schools need the big picture on curriculum, which is different from inserting fun activities into the school day.

Ms. Kemp asserted that local universities can really make a difference in professional development. Often people don't or can't take advantage of opportunities. In setting priorities with the new Superintendent, she would ask how we create incentives or allow teachers time for professional development, and make sure that the right people are taking advantage of opportunities. Ms. Turkel cited an example of successful professional development in the drama program, where people involved in this activity in the schools became integrated into the school team after three years in the schools.

Mr. Dandridge returned to the issue of vision. He believes it is useful for those involved to see each other as colleagues and to negotiate their vision over time. Another key issue he sees is the need to develop more depth in programs, perhaps in fewer buildings to start. Under this approach, you would build a community of learners in one building and then decide how to scale up this program and get to the next level. This approach takes advantage of the experiences and lessons of an in-depth program. Lesley University, for example, has worked hard to build relationships in places like the Agassiz School.

Regarding professional development, Mayor Sullivan is concerned about building hours into the day for teachers to take advantage of this. Among the options are the "learning pods" in schools identified in the Spence Report. The new Superintendent has noted the depth in the faculty, and the need to have a "lifelong teacher" style. For the Mayor, the question is: can you build something that you can take on the road in the schools?

Ms. Walser pointed to the budget as a significant factor in school efforts. Teachers have stated that it is essential to have another adult aide in the classrooms; this would cost \$3 to 5 million. She is not sure if this approach is a good model for the schools and if it goes to the cause or a symptom of school underachievement. In response to Mr. Parravano's question about why teachers want this assistance, Ms. Walser identified the range of abilities and groupings in the classrooms. On this point, Ms. Turkel raised a problem and inherent danger with the use of aides, which is assigning "problem kids" to the least qualified aides to free up other teachers. Mr. Karoff also identified the need for classroom assistance with kids learning English as a second language and for kids with disabilities.

Ms. Turkel also stated that there are significant issues in the high school grades. The restructuring has not been a success. Without a resolution of the high school issue, the public will not have confidence in the system. One of the areas in which the new Superintendent has experience is high school changes.

Mr. Spitz asserted that, with a far-reaching vision, schools can get support from the public, even for big money investments, in order to make good schools better. He

believes there are enormous resources beyond those of the players at the table. However, these potential sources want to know they're investing in something "transformational".

Ms. Miller then raised the next issue on the agenda: what can we do to help the Cambridge schools?

One model for collaboration between schools and universities, identified by Mr. Sneider, is the National Research Council model of pairing schools and universities to prepare teachers of science and math, in which each organization brings its strengths to the effort. Without a vision, he believes that there will only be fragmentary professional development. In Cambridge, one next step might be a smaller task force to work on education initiatives with the new Superintendent. The Museum of Science could take the role of liaison with the schools; other possibilities include making the Museum library available to the schools and producing a WGBH video on professional development highlighting outstanding Cambridge teachers.

Mr. Parravano emphasized the potential of having the right group of a reasonable number of people to focus on the issue, and the fact that there is no shortage of resources. Fifteen years ago, the Cambridge Partnership for Public Education organized around these issues, but it is no longer active. He also agreed that, without confidence in the schools, business is less likely to invest. He believes that professional development for teachers is key to any dramatic change in school achievement. Given the discussion about teacher responsibilities, Mr. Parravano also asked if the union should be included in any working group. Right now, he perceives a holding pattern on the issue of education reform, pending the formation of the new Superintendent's cabinet. He has been frustrated dealing with the central School office and feels that the group needs the right mechanisms in place for the discussion and follow-up on changes.

Ms. Turkel suggested that the university representatives invite the new Superintendent to a meeting and offer their services without any specific expectations, by way of outreach. It seems to her that the participants are poised and ready for connection and to make a new plan for the schools.

Councillor Maher noted that MIT has offered to host a reception and conversation with the Superintendent; this is an important early note to set. He also commented on the initiatives that entities like Biogen and the Museum have taken on their own, including contacting the School Committee with ideas. Ms. Power considers Ms. Turkel's suggestion a terrific idea and stated that Harvard looks forward to introducing the Superintendent to its resources.

Mayor Sullivan has been discussing setting up such meetings for the Superintendent. According to the Mayor, there is a need to break down the "fiefdom" aspect of the schools and the resistance to "outsider" initiatives, which can be difficult; the School Committee must stand up to this. At the same time, he believes it is important to reduce micromanagement by the School Committee.

Ms. Turkel noted that there is unequal leadership in the schools on issues like professional development, which doesn't necessarily occur in the schools that need it the most. This in turn lets inequities grow without check.

Mr. Parravano asked if there was some oversight in the central school office on curriculum coordinators. On the same point, Ms. Walser asked about the lines of authority between principals and the curriculum coordinators. She feels they are not clear. According to Ms. Walser, this is another issue that the new Superintendent has experience with.

Ms. Turkel stated that it is important to clarify school-based vs. system expectations and to be realistic about the powers of the new Superintendent, who, after all, is not a messiah or miracle worker.

Ms. Power wants to make sure that professional development resources connect with city needs. It would be helpful to know what kinds of approaches, from various points of view, have delivered the most value, and been the most successful along these lines. On this point, Ms. Turkel commented that she is not sure we have a mechanism to know what's effective. For example, non-curriculum activities can be the most valuable to kids' learning. In the Mayor's experience, teachers' connection with and expectations of kids make a big difference in their achievement.

Ms. Jarvis raised the importance of community responsibility and asked what provisions there are to work with families to ready kids for school or to reach home-based day care. The Mayor responded that the city has made strides on some of these issues, for example, in its literacy campaign; Ms. Turkel also noted that the city is building programs for kids of different ages.

Ms. Miller briefly summarized the discussion (**Attachment B**). Mr. Parravano thanked everyone present and commented that, although it is hard to structure the next steps, the conversations have been helpful. Mayor Sullivan emphasized the personal and economic reasons for everyone to work on improving public education.

Councillor Maher thanked all those present for their participation, which helped to clear the air about the direction the committee should take and he stated that there will be more meetings.

The meeting adjourned at 3:20 P.M.

For the Committee,

David P. Maher
DPM

Councillor David P. Maher, Chair

Committee Report #1

A communication was received from D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk, transmitting a report from Councillor David P. Maher, Chair of the University Relations Committee, for a meeting held on May 30, 2003 for the purpose of discussing with the School Committee, university and Museum of Science representatives how the universities and other educational institutions can contribute to the improvement of public pre-K-12 education.

In City Council June 23, 2003

**REPORT ACCEPTED.
PLACED ON FILE.**