

**ROUNDTABLE/WORKING MEETING  
CHARTER SCHOOLS**

DATE Monday, October 24, 2016

TIME 5:31 PM

LOCATION Sullivan Chamber

PURPOSE Roundtable/working meeting between City Council and School Committee to discuss Charter Schools

ATTENDEES Mayor Simmons, Councillor Carlone, Councillor Cheung, Councillor Devereux, Councillor Kelley, Councillor Maher, Councillor Mazen, Vice Mayor McGovern, Councillor Toomey, Lisa Peterson, Acting City Manager, Louis DePasquale, Assistant City Manager for Fiscal Affairs, Ellen Semonoff, Assistant City Manager for Human Services, Jeanna Franconi, Budget Director, Sandra Albano, Executive Assistant to the City Council, Tony Clark, School Liason, Mayor's Office, Paula Crane, Deputy City Clerk, Donna P. Lopez, City Clerk.

School Committee members: Kathleen Kelley, Patty Nolan, Fred Fantini and Emily Dexter. School Department Personnel: Dr. Kenneth Salim, Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Carolyn Turk, Deputy Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Laurie Likis, Chief Planning Officer, Dr. Victoria Greer, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services, Anda Adams, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Instruction, Maryann MacDonald, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education, James Maloney, CEO, School Department and Claire Spinner, CFO, School Department.

OTHER ATTENDEES Sherley Bretous-Carre, Principal, Benjamin Banneker Charter School, Molander Etienne, Benjamin Banneker Charter School, Caleb Hurst-Hiller, Head of School, Community Charter School of Cambridge (CCSC), Ali Nomani, High School Principal, CCSC, Becki Norris, Middle School Principal, CCSC, Angela Allen, Principal, Prospect Hill Academy Charter School and Emma Stellman, Chief Academic Office, Prospect Hill Academy.

## **DISCUSSION SUMMARY**

Mayor Simmons opened the meeting at 5:31 PM. Mayor Simmons stated that the meeting is being privately recorded. She stated that the City Council and the School Committee met early in the term to discuss issues of interest. She stated that the City Council and the School Committee agreed that they should have more opportunities to have conversations among themselves over the shared jurisdictions. She stated that next meeting will be on Universal Pre-K. She stated that she will try to have two other Round tables. The attendees introduced themselves. She stated that the goals and objectives are to talk about student achievement for all children in Cambridge. A document containing questions that will be discussed was distributed (**ATTACHMENT A**). Mayor Simmons invited Dr. Salim to give opening remarks.

Dr. Salim stated that he is excited about this Roundtable and to hear from the Charter Schools in the City. He is hopeful to learn from each other on how to address the achievement gap.

The discussion focused on addressing and uncovering strategies to address the Achievement.

Shirley Bretous-Carrie spoke about the coaching and professional development model used by the Benjamin Banneker School. She stated that a lot of time is spent looking at data. School Committee member Nolan asked for more in depth information on what your coaches are doing. She asked if the coaches are in the classroom while teaching. Ms. Molander Etienne explained that the roll of the coaches is multi-faceted. They help develop curriculum, onsite professional development, collaborate with teachers and their associates, look at the data to analyze for strengths and weaknesses. They also observe and provide feedback to teachers.

Dr. Turk stated that we will find tonight that there are a lot more similarities than we realizes. Cambridge has both school-based coaches as well as district coaches. They also have smaller number of coaches in social studies and science. She stated that what has been tried with upper schools is that there are coach intervention positions who spend some time with teachers and strategize with students as well. There is strong focus on data so that when data is reviewed, they adjust practices as necessary.

Mayor Simmons asked if there are particular lessons for any particular demographic. Dr. Turk stated that once the instructional leadership teams dig into the data, clearly there are groups and sub-groups of children who are experiencing challenges and successes but it does fall across all demographics. They do look at demographics but they are really focusing on the areas of need and to see if there are trends.

Caleb Hurst-Hiller stated that one of the lessons learned is that for years they had a teacher/mentor system and then they had a formal evaluator also working with teachers. It got to the point that it was very difficult for some of the younger teachers to take feedback from multiple sources. They moved to one-to-one coaching. Everyone on the leadership team evaluates the faculty. A single voice has made a difference for them. He stated that examination of data happens in the coach/teacher forum.

Ms. Etienne stated that at the Banneker, the coaching model provides teachers with 3 levels of support: whole group, small group and individual support. The teachers focus on how they need to teach students and how do they know that the students are learning.

Angela Allen stated that she believes we all have same challenges with students of color. She stated that until we see the needle moving on those students, it will perpetuate the gap. The Prospect Hill Academy are strategic on having a culturally relevant curriculum. She stated 88% are students of color. She stated that they partner with two programs where they had framework for processes and standards that the schools can align with. They are very focused on ensuring that they are engaging students in their identity. Dr. Turk stated that they are not at the same level in terms of how deeply they have been able to weave that support into the curriculum. Mayor Simmons stated that when they look at the MCAS scores the gap remained. She asked how we close the Achievement Gap. She noted that she likes the idea of the culturally relevant curriculum. Ms. Bretous-Carre commented we are never there. Dr. Turk stated that more work can be done because there is a wealth of knowledge that could be incorporated into the curriculum.

Mr. Hurst-Hiller stated that they are in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of devoting time to equity professional development. Part of it focuses on culturally relevant curriculum and also focuses on the educators in attempting to move everyone's comfort in terms of race and privilege. This strengthens the instructional climate. He stated that 45% are teachers of color and the work with all staff is critical. He stated that this year it will be over 20 hours over the course of the school year.

Mayor Simmons stated that when discussing cultural competency, we automatically think of race. She stated that if we focus on privilege we may not talk about this as much as we should. School Committee member Kathleen Kelley stated that we skirt around this issue in her belief. She stated that we need to move beyond that and it is at all levels throughout the system. She stated that the professional development training needs to be for the whole system; not just teachers or coaches or principals; it is not enough. It is a difficult conversation but that is how you make progress. Mayor Simmons stated that she and Ms. Kelley have looked at training for the policy makers.

Mr. Ali Nomani stated that this is the only professional development offered at CCSC where every person in the school is required to attend. That speaks volumes for how much they care about this issue. He stated that last year they celebrated Black History Month in their school and 22% of their Hispanic students also wanted Hispanic Heritage Month. He stated that they are proud of the advanced placement participation rates. He stated that this work helps change the narrative of students and helps adults have the conversations with students in a more responsive way. Ms. Allen stated that adults need to engage. She stated that last year they focused on four forms of modern day racism: denial, rescuing, avoidance and blaming. They began as school leaders to call these out and began the conversation about how to change that. They are making concerted effort.

Councillor Kelley stated that if we want to do something meaningful and successful, we need to pour money into it. Teachers are at the center of every conversation. If we want to bite this off, we must pour money into it, make long-term plans, and support people in the schools. He said that it will be expensive and difficult.

Councillor Cheung stated that he agrees with Councillor Kelley. He asked how much does that cost in terms of times and money? How much has been poured into that effort? Mayor Simmons stated that if we do not put everything into making a difference, then we are falling short. She stated that DHSP has taken on this issue in many of the programs in the city. Councillor Cheung clarified that any money spent will be well worth the effort. Ms. Allen said that it costs very little. She said that it is more about commitment.

Emma Stellman, PHA, stated that the vehicle for raising expectations is relationships. That is what sets apart some of the work that they do among the three Charter Schools. She stated that PHA is committed to restorative practices which is predicated on the idea of relationship and restoring relationships. The work that they do with students, families, teachers/students, colleagues is all based on restorative practices. She stated that this is a foundational piece of the work that is done at PHA.

Vice Mayor McGovern stated that we can have the strongest curriculum, best professional development and amazing teaching staff, unless we are dealing with what happens outside the schools we will not make a difference. He stated that when looking at cost, it is in the schools but it is also what we are doing outside the schools to support students and their families. Support needs to come from many different fronts.

Mr. Ali Nomani, CCSC, stated that they rely on strong relationships that are built through the curriculum. They call families 8 times per year to discuss the students and ensure that they can be involved in activities. Mr. Hurst-Hiller stated that you have to set the bar high and create support. He stated that early on they thought it was enough to hold the bar high and hope that students got where they needed to be. They came excited this evening to talk about interventions that they have built into their curriculum. He stated that systematic interventions are what lead to the closing of the gaps.

Becky Norris stated that although they look at a lot of data, they try to remember that they track every student so they do not fall into the cracks. When they are able to close gaps, they close gaps with lots of individual students. Advisors have 11 or 12 students and every other week she sits with the advisors and when they notice that a student is struggling, they immediately assign interventions. The students are referred to the student support team. That team will come up with the higher tier interventions and then every other week the grade level team of teachers meet. They are doing lots of kid talk so that everyone can get on the same page but they are tracking how the interventions are working. She stated that eventually they have a record of interventions that are tried in regular education and that is where they might be advised toward special education. Ms. Etienne stated that as a parent, she gets regular phone calls, she feels heard and her advisor asks questions and she feels safe. She stated that we do not touch upon relationships in the culture of the school. She stated that they had 11 homeless families last year. She stated that the reality is that if the teachers did not know what was going on in the private lives of students, they could not help them internally. She said it is important to help the teachers tackle that situation while focusing on education. She stated that the teachers know that they must ensure that students have a solid foundation. She stated that 88% of her students are African American. She stated that their parents and teachers trust the administration.

Councillor Cheung stated that the City Council hears from public about how to get more engaged with Kendall Square. He stated that he would like the schools to talk about engagement and what we can do better. Mr. Hurst-Hiller stated that there are 2 specific practices: one assists the other. He stated that Roundtable presentations are held at the end of the school year have requirement for promotion that includes sitting for a 45 minute Roundtable presentation. In almost all of the Roundtables there is a member of the community and oftentimes someone that the student has not met. He stated that this serves to bring people from the community inside of the schools which allows them to make connections for their senior internship program. It is a 100 hour unpaid internship and then present publicly on the experience in order to graduate.

Mr. Nomani, CCSC, stated that they have a few people in the room that have attended these Roundtables. They have a gender mentoring program where they have female and male mentoring which is an opportunity for mentors to work with the students. The program is centered on what it is like to be a person of color in the community and what it means to be safe in who they are as a person.

Dr. Turk stated that they have partnership with Biogen, Draper and Novartis. Each of these companies have programs where students are paired with mentors. She stated that they have longstanding program called Key Pals where some students have relationships with writing and use of technology and at the end of the year they present with their partners from Draper. They also have some science vacations through Biogen. She stated that they also have Portfolio Panels. Dr. Salim stated that RSTA has partnerships. He stated that a lot of great work and innovative work has taken place. Mayor Simmons stated that children deserve more. She said Cambridge has an embarrassment of riches. She stated that any student that attends school in Cambridge should not want for anything. We need to get better at reaping the benefits from these businesses and universities.

Councillor Carlone stated that he was part of a group Say Yes to Education that brought in sponsors. For 15 years they followed 15 kids and they became aunts and uncles to these children. He stated that they did have a benefactor. These kids were at the lowest academic level in the city. He wanted to emphasize the personal connection. He stated that personal attention is the key and this transformed their lives.

Mr. Nomani stated that their students love the Workforce Program offered by the city. He stated that the Cambridge's Harvard Summer Academy at Rindge is also another valuable program. These are great opportunities.

Patty Nolan stated that the Roundtables and Portfolios are very good to do. She stated that she remembers the Junior Journey Program that students participated in and that their lives were transformed.

Ms. Allen stated that they send students to Guatemala to do service-oriented work. They send 1/3 of students. She said that she felt every junior needed a journey. They then sent 1/3 to Vermont. These have been successful and they are looking at ways to expand to a K-12 journey. Mayor

Simmons stated that the Fletcher-Maynard consistently sends students on such experiences. Ms. Allen stated that these experiences are important but they only happen for a selected segment.

Ms. Stellman stated that it is not that they reach out to the community because we want the students to have jobs. This has to be done intentionally and they must think about which kids are being served and what students are marginalized. These are very intentional. To move to the social/emotional side, there is a lot of research that is coming out about college perseverance. She stated that at PHA they are starting to think about elements of social and emotional learning that are key. She stated that some of the grades and report cards that are given to students, there is a single number that mixes together pieces of data. She stated that decoupling social/emotional learning from academics is very important. That is one of their key focuses.

Dr. Salim stated that they are engaging in similar conversations in CPS. He stated that leadership development is used to develop preventative strategies on social and emotional competency. Dr. Turk noted that years ago as they were trying to figure out what is most important in terms of social/emotional learning it was noted that when a student misbehaved they were punished. She said that the adults have to figure out strategies. The work that the district has been doing around responsive classroom, developmental designs fit together with support from the school psychologist, adjustment counselors, social workers and mentors. All of these supports together are the pieces that are most effective.

Councillor Kelley stated that this is not cheap and is not easy. There is \$100,000 in budget for social/emotional learning, etc. We need to give teachers adequate training. He stated that we cannot do it on the cheap. We must be intentional.

The discussion now focused on Cultivating a Cambridge Collective.

Mayor Simmons stated that she has heard several parents of color chose Charter School because they like the more disciplined approach, smaller learning environments and uniforms. She stated that these are reasons that she has heard that people are choosing Charter Schools. Dr. Turk stated that there was a survey completed last year with the families. This was one way to gather information. Also, individual principals tried to have similar conversations. Dr. Turk stated that she does not have the data but many of the people in the neighborhood will say that the relationship piece is really big and that their child will be well-known in a smaller and tighter environment. Ms. Bretous-Carre stated that they have a lot of families because one child went to a Charter School and was successful. She stated that it is the attitude about being present. She stated that they are very accommodating and their doors are always open. She added that they spend a lot of time on Banneker experiences. She stated that they are giving kids opportunities that they would not have otherwise and staff does this work without compensation.

Mr. Nomani stated that while some people appreciate uniforms, he does not know how much he believes in their efficacy. He stated that the reason why families choose them is because they are unapologetic about college access and they do everything that they can to make sure that that is a reality. They work with families and have had 5 family nights since the school year began. He stated that they have exceptional access to advanced placement courses to students of color. Mayor Simmons asked what they have tried and were successful to get students into advanced placement

courses. Mr. Nomani stated that it is intentional programming and hard work. He stated that they do have a longer school day and the students have access to their teachers.

Ms. Stellman stated that most Cambridge families are not choosing Charter Schools. She stated that Charter Schools are mostly students of color. She stated that almost 1/3 of Cambridge students of color are attending Charter School. That is astounding. She stated that we must need to be specific about what families are and are not attending Charter Schools. She stated that regarding programming intentionality, she stated that it is intentional for a specific demographic of students and families that have been marginalized. Ms. Allen stated that they are required to submit annual goals to the Department of Education. One of their goals in the next 5 years is that every student will have an advanced placement course before they graduate. They are working towards how to make that happen. She pointed out that families are attracted to PHA because of their robust family engagement. They have an active family advisory board. They have family campus ambassadors to represent campuses around family activities and events.

Ms. Norris stated that there are more students in advance placement classes. She stated that a lot of it starts with building a schedule to allow students the access advanced placement of classes. She stated that they do not want advance placement classes to take a lot of time out of study classes. They build the master schedule around the advance placement classes.

The discussion now centered on Community School Climate and Culture.

Ms. Bretous-Carre stated that teacher competency is important. The students are not bored. She stated that a teacher can call almost any parent and they can handle problem without getting to suspension. She stated that they want parents to have choices. She thinks that it is difficult to get documents from CPS. She stated that she can call regularly. She stated that it would be helpful if there was more cooperation in getting the required documents. The other piece is that if we could find more ways to take advantage of some of the things that are happening would be beneficial. Banneker is always willing to have more conversation with the CPS.

Ms. Stellman stated that in terms of suspensions, PHA try to have a targeted approach to decrease suspensions of students. They try to figure out who is getting suspended and why and use restorative approach that includes teachers and families. They have been successful in decreasing suspension rates. In terms of what she would like to ask from CPS, it has not always been a friendly environment for Charter Schools. She has felt boxed out and slandered and marginalized as schools. She stated that it is about having doors closed actively to Charter School students. She stated that she wishes that we could try to figure out how to restore this relationship. Mayor Simmons stated that the fight is not the students or families.

Ms. Allen thanked Mayor Simmons for sending the agenda for the meeting in advance. She stated that she appreciates how it has actualized and she appreciates the tone that was sent forth by Mayor Simmons as well as the opportunity for collaboration.

School Committee member Kelley stated that she hopes that this continue and overcome the history that existed. The focus is on the children. This is an important step to take.

School Committee member Nolan stated that we as leaders have to have these conversations.

Councillor Mazen stated that there are not enough hours to take in all of the learnings and experiences. He stated that things like having 5 parent nights has been an important way to engender family awareness about college prep, etc. He stated that we need a plan of implementation for low-hanging fruit. He stated that when he speaks to immigrant families and low-socioeconomic residents, they are not getting high levels of engagement.

School Committee member Fantini stated that CPS has principals that do home visits to children and he stated that he feels that tonight was about best practices of Charter Schools. He looks forward to hearing more from Charter School representatives as well as CPS staff that he is proud of.

Councillor Devereux thanked all present. She stated that safety was an important consideration for many families. Some were coming from other cities and towns but it was also a cultural safety. She stated that she has been on committee along with Mayor Simmons and School Committee member Kelley around gender and sexual harassment issues. She stated that it is important to make sure that all students feel safe. She would love Charter School colleagues to participate in that conversation.

Mr. Hurst-Hiller stated that they take best practices very seriously. He stated that some of the most collaboration they have is with the CPS. He stated that some of their faculty visited the Amigos School who came back raving about best practices. He stated that he hopes that this leads to collaboration. He stated that it has been a struggle to create opportunities on his staff who want to do that work. He thanked Mayor Simmons for organizing the meeting.

School Committee member Dexter wanted an opportunity for the educators to listen and talk with the Charter Schools. She added that the Charter Schools are educating a different population than CPS.

Councillor Carlone stated that he appreciated the honesty and openness. He stated that everyone in the room loves kids. He stated that his two sons needed two completely different kinds of education. He stated that one loved CRLS and the other needed a smaller group. He stated that this is the key. There are different kinds of environments for different kinds of kids. He stated that there is something about social understanding and feeling comfortable. He stated that this was a fabulous discussion.

Councillor Kelley cautioned all that there is no low-hanging fruit. He stated that this will take a lot of work, perhaps brutal honesty and a lot of money.

Mr. Nomani thanked all present. He stated that regarding equity, he offered that these things are hard to get off the ground but are not magic. He offered his assistance to help any CPS principals to have conversation. This is not very expensive work as he believes that we can internally build capacity.

School Committee member Dexter stated that denominational schools and private independent schools are not present at this meeting.

Mayor Simmons thanked all present for their attendance. She stated themes she heard are equity and access, how to have better collaboration between schools.

ADJOURNMENT                      On motion of School Committee member Fantini the meeting  
Adjourned at 7:35 PM on a voice vote.

A TRUE COPY:

ATTEST:-

Donna P. Lopez, City Clerk

*A list of documents and other exhibits used at the meeting:*

*Agenda*