



**Cambridge Advanced Learning Association**

Providing community, resources, and advocacy for families  
<http://cambridgeadvanced.org/>

February 21, 2012

Dear Dr. Young, Dr. Turk, Mayor Reeves, Mr. Fantini, Mr. Harding, Mr. McGovern, Ms. Nolan, Mr. Osborne, and Ms. Turkel,

In advance of your upcoming budget retreat, we are writing to ask you, with the greatest sense of urgency, to commit to providing resources that will reach *all* advanced learners in the CPS Upper Schools, especially those from disadvantaged families.

This letter is a follow-up to the budget proposal that we sent to Mr. McGovern last week, and then sent to each of you as well. A copy is attached.

We understand the constraints on the CPS budget this year. So we want to emphasize that the commitment of resources we are asking for comprise a *small, efficient, and effective* use of funds that will have a significant and direct benefit on helping advanced learners whose families have no other resources for their children than a public education.

We implore you: do not hamstring the fledgling Academic Challenge Program. Do not set it up for failure right out of the gate by neglecting to provide district-level oversight and resources. Instead, let's be truly innovative in the Cambridge Public Schools, and bring our school district into the 21st century, by creating a real and successful program that supports our advanced learners at the same time as we support all students. Let's make the "**both/and**" a reality. Let's put our money where our mouths are.

We have heard members of our community talk repeatedly about how difficult it is to do differentiated instruction well. Please give our Upper School teachers the best possible chance of success in their new classrooms, by providing them with essential support at the district level, in the form of an **Academic Challenge Program Manager** who will create coherence, consistency and communication for all the teachers about the needs of advanced learners. Please help our teachers succeed with curriculum development and differentiation, with delivering assessment and Subject Acceleration Protocols, with creating effective Cluster Grouping, and with professional development around the issue of advanced learners. Without your commitment to district-level management, you undermine our teachers' ability to equitably deliver their best to all their students. *Please do right by our teachers.*

As you all know full well, there are parents of advanced learners in our community who are able to advocate for their children, to schedule meetings, make phone calls, provide paid enrichment opportunities, and push hard for solutions for their kids. But there are just as many parents of advanced learners who cannot do these things. They don't have the time, the money, the language skills, or the cultural ease. These families have only *you* to rely on, to insure that their kids receive an equitable and excellent education.

In recent months you have seen the commitment of CALA parents to this issue. You have witnessed the hours and expertise we have volunteered toward helping the district come up with a socially just

solution to providing an appropriate education to advanced learners from all circumstances, at the same time as we support all students in the Cambridge Public Schools. But without an official role for our parent group at the district level, we cannot truly be equitable in our work. We cannot reach out to all families without that channel. We cannot equitably give families access to experts in the field and to each other. We cannot fully help with anti-bullying work. Without support at the district level we are held back in seeking grants and other funding sources. In creating a **CALA Family Liaison**, you will enable our committed parent advisory group to connect with all the Cambridge families who need these resources. *Please do right by our families.*

In our district, right now, are advanced learners from disadvantaged backgrounds who run a disproportionately higher risk of dropping out of high school or college. These kids run a disproportionately higher risk of becoming substance abusers. They run a disproportionately higher risk of crashing & burning spectacularly. Please do the right thing, and provide these students—the students who need these resources most – with expertise, guidance, and support at the district level. Please set them up for success.

I was one of those kids growing up. I was an advanced learner with one academic resource in my life: a public school education. Coming from my family, there was no guarantee that I was going to make it. The reason I have managed to create a healthy, productive life is because of a public school education system that took on the responsibility of meeting the needs of advanced learners from every background. That education set me on the right path. Please, we can and we must do the same thing for advanced learners in the Cambridge Public Schools. We must show these kids that we value and respect who they are as learners, and that their futures are safe in our hands. *Please do right by our students.*

[This week the US Dept of Education announced its new [RESPECT Project](#), to elevate the teaching profession. Maybe some of Cambridge's advanced learners will become teachers. Please, help them get there.]

If, from a budget standpoint, this is not the year to place an **Academic Challenge Resource Teacher** in each Upper Schools, we ask that, *at the very least*, you put in place, at the district level, a full-time **Academic Challenge Program Manager**, and a part-time **CALA Family Liaison**. We have outlined these roles in the attached budget proposal.

Let's have our district be the model for how this can be done. The next time the US Education Secretary comes through and meets with Cambridge's educational leaders, let's hear him say: you guys are getting the "**both/and**" right. Let's set our Academic Challenge Program up for success so that ten, twenty, thirty years from now, teachers, students and parents will look back and say that this was the moment when the Cambridge Public Schools turned things around for advanced learners from every walk of life.

Sincerely,

- Freedom Baird, with input from ten CALA parents

Freedom Baird  
CPS parent, CALA coordinator  
<http://cambridgeadvanced.org/>



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February 12, 2012

Academic Challenge Program – proposed hires – *in order of priority, most needed first:*

### **(1) Academic Challenge Resource Teachers – Full time, one per Upper school (akin to math or literacy coaches; start with four in the upper schools; eventually one in each elementary school)**

- Degree/background in gifted education
- Serve as a resource to classroom teachers, parents, students
- Work with classroom teachers, parents, and students to identify students, and develop and implement Subject Acceleration Protocols; emphasize identification of underserved students
- Work with classroom teachers to help them successfully differentiate instruction, do curriculum compacting, and develop extension and enrichment opportunities within their classrooms
- Work with classroom teachers to form flexible clusters of students in need of services
- Lead whole-class, cluster group, or one-on-one extension lessons as a way of supporting classroom teachers throughout the school year
- Work with clusters of students both inside and outside of the regular classroom for designated periods of time on specific topics

### **(2) Academic Challenge Program Manager - Full Time, District level (akin to Aida Ramos/Richard Whitehead)**

- Degree/background in gifted education and program management
- Coordinate teacher training, professional development around issues of advanced learners
- Oversee student assessment and identification at the district level, insure identification of underserved students
- Coordinate delivery of services to identified students, including Subject Acceleration Protocols, Cluster Grouping, curriculum compacting, etc.
- Coordinate Academic Challenge Resource Teacher hiring and scheduling
- Seek out and write grants, pursue other sources of funding
- Seek out current research, best practices, attend conferences, keep the district and teachers apprised

### **(3) CALA Family Liaison, (akin to Rosalie Rippey/Melody Brazo) - Part Time**

- Serve as a contact person for families, and as a liaison between families and the district
- Help families connect to resources and community around the issue of advanced learners
- Insure that underrepresented families are informed about resources & welcomed and included in events for advanced learners
- Coordinate monthly workshops and meetings, coordinate guest speakers
- Post up-to-date resources and news for the community