



Cambridge Advanced Learning Association

Providing community, resources, and advocacy for families

<http://cambridgeadvanced.org/>

March 6, 2012

Dear Dr. Young, Dr. Turk, Mayor Davis, Members of the Administration, and Members of the School Committee,

I'm speaking to you this evening as a representative of CALA – the Cambridge Advanced Learning Association, our new parent group.

I'm here to follow up on the budget proposal that CALA submitted to you on February 21st. Firstly, we wanted to thank you for discussing the proposal at your recent budget retreat. We know that this is just one small piece of a much larger picture, and we're aware of all the work you've been doing on the many aspects of the budget. So we appreciate your time and attention to the CALA proposal.

We understand that, budget-wise this is not the year to pursue the Resource Teacher positions we'd outlined.

We want to focus, instead, on a job that we'd presented as two roles, but that could be one position: an Advanced Learning Program Coordinator. [I've attached the description below.]

We understand that, at the budget retreat, some of you expressed concern about an effect of silo-ing, of creating two or more categories of student getting educated differently and inequitably, in the Upper Schools.

So, we want to emphasize that creating an Advanced Learning Program Coordinator will *not* have the effect of silo-ing, just as, for example, Dr. Michelle Madera's job position, to coordinate the delivery of services to English Language Learners does not create silos of ELL kids, and non-ELL kids. It insures that interventions, services, and resources for ELL kids, with their unique learning needs, are delivered equitably, and consistently across the schools. This is not about giving services to one set of kids and depriving another set of kids. This is about consistently and equitably identifying and serving kids whose needs and challenges are unique to who they are as learners.

Also, creating a district level Program Coordinator will be an *efficient use of funds*, because it's one point person at the district level, who can be available to school leaders, teachers, specialists, coaches and parents. The Coordinator will be available to:

- insure that assessment is done fairly and equitably across the schools, not just for kids of parents who ask for it
- clarify procedures about Subject Acceleration Protocols & cluster grouping
- coordinate professional development
- find new, evidence-based resources and make them available to the whole community
- attend the gifted education conference

and so on.

The same goes for the Family Liaison aspects of the job. This too doesn't create silo-ing, in the same way that Melody Brazo's role in the lesbian, gay, transgender and bi community doesn't create two silos of LGBT families and non-LGBT families. She's there to be a resource, a point person, an advocate. To coordinate events and speakers that benefit not just the LGBT community, but the entire Cambridge Public School community.

This month I've been in touch with Dr. Diana Brulles, author of the Cluster Grouping Handbook, Dr. Joy Lawson Davis, author of *Bright, Talented, and Black: A Guide for Families of African American Gifted Learners* [I requested permission to use one of her charts on the CALA website, which she very kindly granted], and Dr. Diana Beck, former head of the Brookline Enrichment program. They all work as educators, but also travel and offer workshops for school communities. But without official channels to invite these and other experts to speak and without official channels to publicize these events, we're not fully taking advantage of their guidance, and equitably making it available throughout our community.

I've been in touch with teachers in our district who agree that it would be very helpful to have professional development around the issue of advanced learners, and to meet and coordinate an approach to these students, and make it consistent throughout the Upper Schools. But without a point person at the district level, this won't happen evenly across the schools.

In the three months since CALA launched, I personally have received emails from several parents trying to figure out what to do about their middle school kids who are advanced in math. Other CALA members have been contacted by parents about students advanced in math, science, language, reading, or a combination of these. These CALA members and I have done our best to direct parents to Mr. Healy and others of our educational leaders, and also to connect them with other parents who have found solutions. But what about the parents who aren't reaching out to us or Mr. Healy or other leaders? What about the parents who would benefit from an information session about advanced learners, offered in their neighborhood, with childcare provided? CALA has a lot of committed volunteers, but our role is limited.

The students who will benefit the most from a Program Coordinator are the advanced learners from disadvantaged families whose parents are less able to advocate for them.

Creating a district-level Program Coordinator does not take away fairness. *It increases fairness for these families.*

One of the big problems with the ISP, as Nancy Brigham Associates pointed out in their report, was that it was not equitably made known to all middle-school-bound students in the Cambridge Public Schools, and it was not coordinated at the district level. Please don't set up this part of our new Academic Challenge Plan for the same fate.

We urge you to commit to creating this Program Coordinator position, to equitably deliver services and interventions to our middle school kids with advanced learning needs. *Especially kids from disadvantaged families.*

Just to underscore one more time: creating this Advanced Learning Program Coordinator position does not take away fairness, on the contrary, it is a cost-efficient way to make this new program for advanced learners *more fair.*

Thank you,

- Freedom Baird, for the CALA community, with input from 8 CALA parents

Freedom Baird

CPS parent, CALA coordinator,

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Proposed job position: Advanced Learning Program Coordinator, includes program manager and liaison duties:

- Degree/background in gifted education and in 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 and publicize workshops with experts in the field, for families and educators; coordinate food and childcare at meetings
- Seek out current research, best practices; attend conferences, keep the district and teachers updated
- Seek out and write grants, pursue other sources of funding
- 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