

**Cambridge Advance Learning Association –
First General Meeting
Dec 2, 2011
Panera Cafe, Porter Sq, Cambridge
<http://cambridgeadvanced.org/>**

In attendance (all CPS parents): Freedom Baird, Ari Epstein, Daniel Serfaty, Julie Croston, Joanne Niklas, Susan Shelkrot, Berkley Lynch, Linda Rabieh, Katharine London, Brian Sadie, Emily Bromley, Nancy Shapiro, Joyce Gerber

Agenda

- 15 min: arriving, socializing
- 15 min: each person introduce self, what's one main goal you have for CALA for this year
- 15 min: presentation and discussion of a "roadmap" for growth of CALA in the coming year, including thoughts on:
 - modeling after CPAC-Special Ed
 - outreach, diversity
 - workshop goals and ideas list
 - policy and programming goals
 - governance and bylaws
 - subgroups
- 15 min: discussion about our prospective roles, ideas about sub-groups, make and prioritize a to-do list

Meeting Minutes

Please note: a core principal of CALA is to maintain the confidentiality of information about our children and families that we share with each other. Any such information in the minutes will be stripped of identifiers, and included as aggregate info. Please be mindful of not publicizing personal information, online, in email, or in conversation, without permission. Thank you.

Parents experiences and concerns about their kids:

- An exceptionally bright 12-year-old, doing college level math and language. Answer from the CPS was “we’re not equipped for this.” Financially it’s hard to get into advanced programs, out-of-school programs.

- A 2nd grader extremely advanced in reading and writing, more typical in other subjects. More typical socially and emotionally. Early on had a teacher who didn't "get" him. Was very depressed. In 1st grade teacher identified him as exceptional. Turned his whole school experience around, changed his outlook on life. We're worried about the future: good years with teachers who "get" him. Bad years with those who don't.
- A bright 6th grader well served by the school at least through 4th grade.
- A very advanced 1st grader who has been tested and assessed and is twice-exceptional.
- A 5th grader, advanced learner, twice exceptional, currently in private school, but parents want her to attend CPS after 6th grade.
- Child is happy with friends but increasingly bored in school, needs to be engaged. We're treading the line of emotional balance.
- One of our kids we pulled out of CPS after 4th grade. He needed very individualized learning. It was frustrating for him because he had friends in school. Some teachers were nasty about it when we discussed this with them. They didn't appreciate the difficulty for a kid like this.
- 3rd and 4th grade was disastrous for both of our kids.
- Two kids who are bright, motivated. Both love learning.
- Middle-schooler who spent an entire year "reading a book", because he had finished the work sooner, and that was the added assignment.
- 1st grader was evaluated for behavioral issues, most likely due to boredom.
- A middle-schooler who is always in motion. Mildly dyslexic. Has gotten through school by outsmarting everyone.
- At our middle school some kids who are advanced in math are left on their own to do what they want. They are not sitting at a classroom table with other kids. There's nobody to help them. Kids come to my house, and we do advanced math for 8th grade girls.

Main goals for CALA:

- A main goal for CALA for the coming year is diversity. Strong desire for our larger parent group to be diverse, and any smaller "steering" group to be diverse as well. There are advanced learners in every grade, in every school, of every race and socio-economic background, who need support.
- Our group will be advocating, lobbying. It can be hard to pull together, but there's a need for it. A goal is to figure out common themes – what "academic achievement" would look like. It's better that we are a group now. We can work to gain a *presence*,

gain a *voice*. It's hard, because it's a taboo subject. For adults to pretend, but kids to *know* what it is, is a travesty.

- Goals for CALA for the coming year: to raise the profile of the issue. To make it part of the overall picture when decisions are being made; an issue that is not taboo to discuss. Also, to make the transition from anecdote to data: it's very easy for people to think of this as separate, individual problems, but when they see that it's a *group* of children who are underserved they will understand the issue differently.
- Medium-term goal: in the middle grades, things are progressing quickly. That's a place where we can make a difference. We need to serve all kids.
- Long term goal: To lift the taboo in Cambridge [about talking about Advanced Learners].
- Either the administration doesn't know, or they doesn't think needs of advanced learners are important. It's discrimination to not support kids who need advanced learning.
- A CSAG election is coming up. It's a useful group. CSAG has the willing participation of the Superintendent.
- As the Innovation Agenda is ramping up, any sort of initiative to have enrichment is useful. There's a tension between what we have time to do, and standards. There are many kids that could use so much more challenge and opportunity. There's been a focus on just helping the kids who are struggling.
- It's so heartening to see all the posts [on the CALA parents-only Yahoo group] about people's personal experience. A goal is to put this issue on the radar for teachers and schools. To systematize an approach. The Innovation Agenda is reminiscent of the previous consolidation.
- A goal is to contribute to working with the school system to help insure that advanced learners have the best opportunities they need. This includes advanced learners who are very advanced, and also others how are somewhat advanced, but still need additional challenge. I'm very excited about the community we'll generate.
- Goal is to find solutions that are not discriminatory. When I was a grade-school student, there was a way to allow kids to progress at our own pace, within our grade. It was a system that worked. In northeastern Ohio.
- Still figuring out how the school system addresses these kinds of issues. Trying to find solutions.
- Looking for a feeling of community in this. It's been a very private, shameful task almost. The power of numbers might be a great thing. To make it legitimate, to be able to present something more official to a teacher, the way we do when a student has an IEP.

- ISP has helped a lot, socially. Peer groups, peer sharing. The writing & editing program has been extraordinarily impressive. Math teaching has been a disappointment all the way through up to 11th grade. At the high school we've been very impressed with the leveled classes, other than math.
- Even kids who aren't exceptionally gifted but still bright are also not being served. Standards are very low, even for those not "gifted". Teachers have said "your kids are going to be fine." There's no excitement about what the kids *can* do and want to do. Goal is for there to be high standards, excitement about kids who can write their own curriculum. There have been wonderful suggestions for reading [age-appropriate books for advanced readers] on the CALA parent online group.
- There needs to be space in our district for advanced learners. I have been a huge advocate for public education. The ISP has changed the educational experience for some students. The normative culture in ISP is high expectations. Some ISP kids advanced in math are still expected to teach other kids. At the recent roundtable on Academic Challenge, the HS student Grant said "sometimes it's easier to teach other kids than to push yourself."

Freedom Baird presented a **Roadmap for growth of CALA:**

- Modeling after CPAC-Special Ed
 - Attend a CPAC workshop on 12/8, meet with Rosalie Rippey, learn about CPACs structure, governance, funding, flyers in the backpacks, and how they interact with CPSD administration and school committee
- Outreach, diversity
 - Have at least one parent from each school be a CALA contact, with their info on the website. That parent posts to that schools listserv when updates go out to CALA group
 - Meet with some school committee members for ideas, guidance
 - Make a brochure or flyer
 - Meet with family liaisons, asst principals, principals at underrepresented schools
 - Reach out to teachers who have joined the CALA list
- Workshop goals and ideas list
 - Pick a few workshops to do first, pick a "week of the month", alternate between a morning one month and an evening the next
 - Have one or two people "produce" each workshop
 - I can coordinate publicity for the workshops

- Policy and programming goals
 - Who in our group has experience in educational policy and educational programming?
 - Form a sub-group that can interact with admin and School Committee on a regular basis
- Governance and bylaws
 - This is part of becoming an official PAC (parent advisory council)
 - How many general meetings per year? Two, three, four?
 - Is consensus better than Robert's rules?
- Subgroups
 - Subgroups can form to take on projects that interest people
 - Could have subgroups for: outreach, workshop coordination, policy & programming, funding, governance, etc.
 - What are people's interests, what motivates you, what would you like to take on?

Discussion about the "roadmap":

- December 12th there's a CSAG meeting at Fletcher-Maynard. Bring a CALA flyer to distribute.
- On diversity – think about meeting times and locations. Think about space. Use the library.
- There are very different cultural norms, in terms of who shows up to meetings. Very often low-income parents, and African-American middle class parents don't come. We get a lot more participation in our online forum. People will come out for a particular issue.
- Organize meetings around central topics.
- For some parents, having to go outside of their school makes it harder. Childcare is a draw.
- Do outreach to teachers. Teachers can distribute a list of all the different groups (CPAC, CALA, CSAG etc). Teachers can distribute flyers to parents.
- CSAG has two reps from each school. It formed last April. They meet once a month. The Superintendent and his staff are at every meeting. He always presents a 12 minute

summary. The meeting rotates to different school buildings. Submit a topic on advanced learning, to be included on an upcoming CSAG agenda. January.

- We can do outreach to parents who have pulled their kids out of CPS and sent them to private schools, or who are home schooling. Have parents at private schools give us advice about what would tempt them back.
- Bring parents from other districts to talk about what's working there. Have CALA general meetings once a month, to start out. Plan the next CALA meeting a week before the January CSAG meeting, to organize something to present at the CSAG meeting.
- Make sure work is done between the meetings, take on assignments.
- What are our priorities at this time? (1) Outreach and diversity. What else?
- We're here, we're not going away, we're present. It's crucial that we be represented in the School Committee and with the Superintendent.
- This isn't just a schools issue, it's a district-wide issue.
- People may be critical. It's important that we achieve some measurable success soon. E.g. a special program that the Superintendent can enact this year.
- A draft of the Academic Challenge policy, and related documents, was discussed at the recent roundtable meeting. What can we do with that document?
- The policy needs to be concrete, needs to have teeth in it.
- Rep from each school, to present interests of any given school.
- I've never seen any assessments for my kids. How are kids assessed? What are some concrete improvements: (1) our kids get tested with a real metric, (2) bring better books into the library and book fair.
- Generate a timeline. Can we be on the agenda for the next CSAG meeting? Plan around specific events. Set the right tone: make ourselves available as a resource. It's a system-wide problem.
- Can get in item on the agenda for the January CSAG meeting. Academic Challenge, advanced learners.
- A specific item to work on, and for the CSAG meeting could be: Identification of advanced learners in the district. Discussion around a system for teachers in early grades to identify and support advanced learners.

- Create a packet to talk with teachers about, for when a kid is identified as being advanced. I can start on this.
- I can work on the booklist generated on the parents' Yahoo group, will collate that so we can put it on the website. Goal: identify other groups like CALA in Massachusetts. Talk to them. Idea for a speaker: Meredith Warshaw.
- Identification of advanced learners needs to be understood—how it's done now, what assessment tools are used, how it could be done. Research shows minority and low income kids who are advanced learners are under-identified. Also kids with disabilities ("twice exceptional") can have their strengths masked and are hard to identify.
- CALA now has a twitter account, which is @CambridgeCALA. Will be contributing tweets and blog posts.
- Will try to do a pilot survey of two schools to understand how and why books are chosen for libraries and for classroom.

End of minutes

Taken by Freedom Baird

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