

**Cambridge United for Education [CUE]**  
*is an independent, city-wide organization  
dedicated to promoting excellence in education in  
the Cambridge Public Schools.*

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**Calendar cues – dates to keep in mind**

**MAY**

- 20<sup>th</sup> CUE conference 7-9 pm
- 21<sup>st</sup> Workshop on Kindergarten entry age
- 28<sup>th</sup> School Committee meeting
- 28<sup>th</sup> Announcement of consolidation plan\*

**JUNE**

- 4<sup>th</sup> School Committee meeting
- 18<sup>th</sup> School's out! School Committee meeting

*\* Scheduled date, subject to change. Public  
hearings likely in late May and/or early June*

**CRLS: New principal, new plan, new  
petition – all in process**

by Richard Freierman

Much remains to be decided about future plans for Cambridge Rindge and Latin School. The principal search is almost over, and hopes are that the new hire will be in place by the end of May. Meanwhile, the Superintendent has announced that any decisions about the design of the small schools will wait until the fall, in order to include the new principal and involve more teachers, families, and students.

Interim Principal Len Solo plans to submit a proposal to the Superintendent by the end of June, with more details on how he and the deans see the small schools' plan unfolding – including the issue of choice and enrollment of students. Dr. Solo says that he does “not expect the school committee to vote on the future of the small schools since they've already done that; I'd expect them to vote on the choice/enrollment piece.” There have, however, been questions raised at the School Committee and elsewhere about the extent of autonomy for the five small schools. This issue will likely continue to be important.

Another topic generating discussion is the status of honors and intensive courses. Current plans call for all but Advanced Placement courses to be phased out soon. Students not in AP classes will be enrolled in heterogeneous groups. Some view such grouping as a key element in ensuring a quality education to all students. However, a number of teachers and parents at CRLS have raised concerns about the preparedness of teachers to teach effectively across a wide range of academic levels in some courses. A group of parents has begun circulating a petition asking for “Challenging academic programs for all students through a flexible administrative and academic structure which includes effective and rigorous curriculum with challenging core, honors and AP programs.” [complete petition text, plus additional thoughts on course issues at CRLS at <http://home.attbi.com/~richardf/crls.>]

There have been a few open forums at CRLS to discuss plans for the school. The last of these ended with parents, teachers, and the CRLS administration all feeling concerned that conversations had become adversarial. To address that, there have been some smaller meetings, including one organized by the Cambridge Teachers Association. More are planned, so stay tuned.

## **Spence Report: What does it mean?**

by Richard Brown

Last January, at the Superintendent's request, Harry Spence of the Rappaport Institute issued a 16-page report on the state of the Cambridge public schools and the central office management of those schools. Since that time, the Superintendent and the School Committee have to a great extent adopted that report as a blueprint of how to reorganize the school system and improve the quality of education.

The report had many criticisms and recommendations, but the most important was that the school system "had not yet clearly espoused a focused, coherent organizational strategy" for the improvement of the educational system. In order to correct this, the report recommended the adoption of a strategy "based on the assumption that student achievement can only be consistently improved if the instructional practices of teachers in the classroom are consistently improved." It emphasized that all decisions should be made to reinforce this goal of improved, school-based, professional development. With this in mind, it recommended several key benchmarks which should "include frequent and sustained collaborative examination of student work, the development of a norm of both supervisory and peer classroom observation, the use of assessment data for diagnostic purposes to guide instruction, and constant communication among school staff to ensure the integration of curriculum and pedagogical practice. Where school leadership is incapable of guiding and supporting the school community in the adoption of such norms and practices, the superintendent is responsible for replacing the principal."

Although the report said that the school system had the capacity and personnel quality to institute such goals, it also said the central administration did not have a cohesive enough organization. It recommended several changes in the structure of the administration of which the two most significant are the creation of two new positions: a deputy superintendent for instruction and a chief of operations, both of whom would be directly responsible to the superintendent. The deputy superintendent for instruction would direct the previously independent departments of Curriculum and

Instruction, Professional Development, Student Achievement and Accountability, and Special Education. The chief of operations would be responsible for finance, human resources, information technology, facilities and support services. In theory, these changes would streamline a complicated school administration.

Currently the administrative changes are moving forward, but the process of developing a sustained attitude towards consistent professional development will take more time.

## **The Bottom Line: CPS Budget**

by Tom Stohlman

Early in the evening of Friday April 12, 2002, the School Committee passed the 2002-2003 school budget. The bottom line was \$116,562,345 to teach 7158 students. The total amount per student came to \$16,280.

The Superintendent and School Committee knew early in the budget season that the City Manager, Robert Healy, was going to limit the rate of increase in the school budget to 3.2% or \$3.6 million. While Cambridge still spends a large percentage of its budget on non-classroom programs and positions, the single greatest cause of budget increases in recent years has been level staffing in the schools despite declining enrollments. This has resulted in a 16:1 average student-teacher ratio.

In 1998, the Superintendent presented a plan, adopted by the School Committee, with a 22:1 student to teacher staffing policy. This was largely ignored in subsequent budgets. This year, she proposed that the current district ratio be increased to 17:1.

Rumors of school closings and mergers (see accompanying article) hovered over the proceedings, but no such actions will occur next school year. \$200,000 was set aside to plan and facilitate consolidations in the future.

The public hearings on the budget were well attended and lively, with some schools well represented (Amigos), certain cuts protested (physical education), and some items hard to understand (the affirmative action job description and curriculum mentors initiative). The Superintendent adjusted her numbers, clarified the explanations, and presented her

final numbers at the April 12 meeting. Most cuts remained, although the Superintendent provided additional School Improvement Plan funds to all schools in order to ease the pain.

Committee members Grassi, Fantini, and Harding, along with Mayor Sullivan, inserted an amendment to restore a teaching position at the Kennedy School. The Kennedy School already had the system's lowest student teacher ratio of 12:1. The amendment actually decreased that number to less than 12 students per teacher. Members Price, Turkel, and Walser opposed this change, citing their objection to singling out the Kennedy for special treatment.

The final budget passed 6-1, with member Price casting a largely symbolic vote against, because of the Kennedy amendment.



### ***School consolidation: sure to happen, but when and which unknown***

by Catherine Sullivan

On May 7, the School Committee approved the Superintendent's policy for elementary school consolidation and improvement. The consolidation will reduce the number of

elementary schools from 15 to 12 by merging and/or closing schools, and possibly creating one or more new schools. In addition to outlining criteria for consolidating schools, the policy calls for the Superintendent to submit a consolidation and improvement plan to the School Committee on May 16.

Consolidation is necessary since a decline in enrollment in the elementary schools has led to many empty elementary school seats. There are 3200 fewer students than total school capacity and 1800 fewer than target capacity (20 students per regular education class, 10 per self-contained special ed class). Target average class size could be achieved with 35 fewer classroom teachers, which would yield considerable savings and lower Cambridge's relatively high per student cost. Plus, since there are thirteen buildings currently occupied by the 15 elementary schools, the School Department offices would be able to move into a city-owned building and out of rental space.

The policy leaves open the possibility that any school except Fletcher-Maynard\* could potentially be affected. The policy lists criteria to be used in selecting schools for merger or closure: under 300 enrollment, enrollment decline of at least 15% in the last five years, and underchosen in the January kindergarten registration for the past three years. However, any other school may be affected by the plan. A school may be relocated in order to implement the plan, an overchosen, highly successful school may be relocated to a larger space to allow increased enrollment, or an overchosen school may be merged with an underchosen school to improve education and to diversify the student population. One of the aims of the plan is to support the growth or creation of schools with strong educational programs that appeal to diverse families.

After the Superintendent presents the plan to the School Committee on May 16, there will be a workshop for the School Committee, a public hearing, and finally a vote by the School Committee, possibly on June 4. The plan will include a timeline; it is expected that no merger, closing, or move will occur before the fall of 2003.

*\* Fletcher-Maynard is the result of a recent merger and has been given special status by the School Committee.*

## **CUE overview**

Cambridge United for Education [CUE] was founded in 1996 by Mary Ann Hart and Catherine Sullivan to provide a city-wide focus on issues affecting students and their families in Cambridge Public Schools. Our purpose is to advocate for the highest quality education in every classroom, on behalf of every child in our schools. We seek accountability and equity in the management of our schools, and to support our children's education by influencing Cambridge School System policy and practice.

As a citywide organization, CUE has developed two primary roles: first, as an advocacy group to address much-needed improvement in the school system and seek accountability at all levels; and second, as an informational source for families to promote discussions and presentations of important academic, school management, and political issues. CUE's Board members meets regularly with Superintendent D'Alessandro, the President of the Cambridge Teachers Association and School Committee members to discuss issues.

CUE's role in supporting positive change, providing coherent information for families city-wide, and being a strong voice for excellence in our public schools is more important than ever. Some potential issues for future activity include:

- Teachers' contract negotiations
- Cambridge Public School budget
- Declining enrollment
- Special needs education and inclusion
- The achievement gaps between schools and economic groups in our system
- Improvement of facilities
- Continued improvement of the High School
- Elementary school consolidation issues
- Support for school improvement

We invite all interested people to join our organization, which requires only caring about improving our schools. No dues, no fine print, just your interest in receiving our e-mail bulletins, our newsletter, and attending our twice-a-year public forums.

Contact information:

[cuechairs@yahoo.com](mailto:cuechairs@yahoo.com) 617-497-7230  
PO Box 380112 Cambridge MA 02238-0112

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**CAMBRIDGE UNITED FOR EDUCATION**  
PO Box 380112  
Cambridge, MA 02238-0112

*CUE is a non-profit 501(c) 3 Massachusetts organization. To contact us: call 617.497-7230, e-mail [cuechairs@yahoo.com](mailto:cuechairs@yahoo.com), or mail PO BOX 380112 Cambridge MA 02238-0112*