

Parenting Education in Cambridge *Preliminary Draft Proposal*

Background

In September 2008, 12 people representing Cambridge's city, program, and political leaders participated in the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) Practitioner's Institute to gain insight into HCZ's comprehensive set of practices and programs with the hope of incorporating some elements into Cambridge's work. Interest is now coalescing around HCZ's Baby College component, which focuses on parenting education.

The preliminary draft proposal below responds to this interest with an outline for a parenting program in Cambridge that meets the specific needs and objectives of our community.

What do we want to do?

Ensure that Cambridge parents and caregivers have the necessary skills and resources to care for their children in ways that foster their positive growth and development.

How do we want to do it?

Coordinate, deepen and enhance Cambridge's parenting education programs by developing an extended parent education model that builds on and supports existing messages and programs.

Who will be involved?

Potential key partners include: Agenda for Children Literacy Initiative, Cambridge Health Alliance, Cambridge Housing Authority, Cambridge Public Schools (Home-Based Program, Title I & Special Start), Cambridge Public Library, Center for Families, Child Care Resource Center, Community Engagement Team, Guidance Center, Inc. (Early Intervention & Healthy Families) and Families First.

Where will it be held?

There are several good options, but a pilot effort could potentially be located in Area IV, with a focus on families who live in the Washington Elms / Newtowne Court housing development, and/or in surrounding apartments with Section 8 vouchers. As of 2004, there were 438 families living in those particular developments, 94 of whom had children under the age of 5 (21 percent of families).

What are the specific program elements?

(1) *Workshops*: Families participate in a series of 8-10 workshops focusing on the following topics:

- Understanding children's brain development
- Increasing the quantity and quality of conversation between children and adults
- Practicing dialogic / interactive reading at home
- Limiting the amount of screen time for children
- Using communication as an effective means of discipline
- Supporting children's socio-emotional health and development
- Connecting to community resources
- Encouraging healthy living (immunization, lead education, sleep, nutrition, stress reduction)

(2) *Home Visits*: Families with children 0-3 receive home visits provided at as-yet-undetermined regular intervals (weekly; monthly; bi-annually; etc) through a collaborative model that includes the Agenda for

Children, the Center for Families, the Guidance Center, and the Cambridge Public Schools' Home-Based Program.

(3) *Care Management*: Each family links with a person – an outreach worker, coach, or “care” manager – who is responsible for bi-weekly contact with the family, helping them to advocate for themselves; navigate multiple systems; and connect with strength-based resources.

(4) *Incentives*: Families receive a range of incentives to encourage consistent participation and to promote positive at-home behaviors, including books and developmental games, as well as gift certificates and other materials that meet the needs for families with young children. In order to encourage positive peer support and reward attendance, every parent will also receive a gift certificate at every session in which all parents are in attendance.

(5) *Supporting Efforts*: Community and city agencies provide playgroups; interactive literacy and learning activities; Arts in the Park activities; preschool parent groups; and StoryWalk, among other projects designed for parents & kids.

How will we recruit families?

Through our partners at the Cambridge Housing Authority, the Community Learning Center, the Community Engagement Team's Outreach Workers, the Men's Health League, the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House, and others, families will be informed about the program and provided with the opportunity and incentive to participate.

What are the intended short and intermediate term outcomes?

- Parents & caregivers increase their awareness of the importance of talking & reading
- Parents & caregivers change how they talk & read with children in positive, measurable ways
- Parents increase understanding and use of positive discipline
- Children limit the amount of time spent in front of a screen
- Families increase their connection to and participation in community resources, including WIC, Cambridge Public Library and out-of-school time programs

What is the intended impact of the program?

- Children enter school on grade level, ready to learn how to read and write
- Parents increase their involvement in their children's education, both at school and at home