



TO: Yi-An Huang, City Manager

FROM: Ellen Semonoff, Assistant City Manager of Human Services

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RE: Update to City Council on Afterschool

DATE: May 5, 2023

Background

Afterschool care is critical to working families. It is also an important contributor to the social and emotional development of children. The City and Department of Human Service Programs (DHSP) recognize and support the value Out of School Time (OST) brings to children, families, and the community, and is committed to expanding access to OST experiences in Cambridge.

The OST sector has a systemic problem that is not unique to Cambridge: there are not enough seats to serve all the children whose families want to send them to an afterschool program. Currently the City of Cambridge offers 20 of the 27 full-week afterschool programs for elementary school aged children in the City (grades JK-5) through 4 program models: Childcare Afterschool, Community Schools, King Open Extended Day and Youth Centers. Collectively, DHSP has 1,102 JK-5th grade seats (an additional 195 seats for 6th-8th grades are offered by the Youth Centers). 7 Community-Based programs offer an additional 405 seats. Together, DHSP and the Community-based programs provide afterschool to 42% of Cambridge Public Schools' JK-5th grade students. While this is not as high as the Department would like, Cambridge has a higher percentage of students enrolled in afterschool programs than state and national averages. In Massachusetts, data suggests that only 27% of families state-wide are able to access OST programs that meet their needs; nationally the number is 18%.

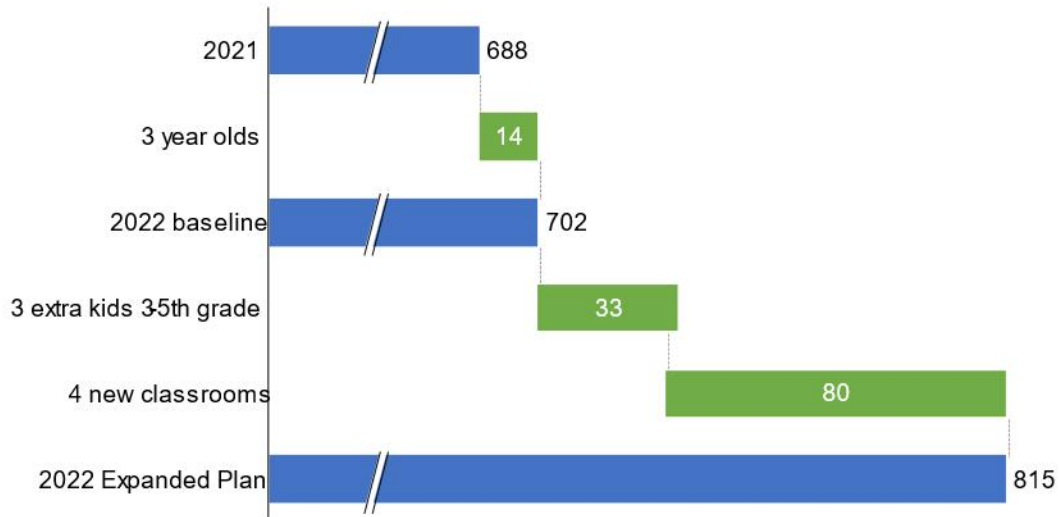
In 2021 an equity-driven change to DHSP's application process and to how financial aid was distributed exposed the true demand for afterschool and created a waitlist of families for the first time. Many of the families on the waitlist had historically been able to get access to program slots because of their ability to wait in line in person on a particular day and their ability to fully pay for their children. The demand for afterschool grew while there was a significant decline both in Cambridge, in Greater Boston and nationally in the number of childcare workers who were entering/re-entering the job market. The ability to staff programs at the existing capacity was significantly challenged and so there was no ability to expand DHSP programs to meet the demand in the 2021-22 program year.

2022-23 Updates

Last summer, city and school leaders worked on a plan to expand Community Schools' capacity by over 100 seats. However, due to the continued challenge with staffing, effective capacity did not grow this past year despite DHSP hiring 52 new staff in 2022.

Community School After School Proposed 2022 Growth Plan

Number of full-time seats



10

Below is an update of our service levels for Community Schools for the [2023-2022](#) school year.

Community School Lottery Timeline Total Eligible Applicant's Snapshot (July 2022 – March 2023)

Date	Applicants			Waiting Pool			Offers		
	Total	Declined	Active	Total	Declined	Active	Total	Declined	Active
7/18/2022	1255	100	1155	457	3	454	798	97	701
8/17/2022	1295	183	1112	395	8	387	900	175	725
9/23/2022	1371	248	1123	395	12	383	976	236	740
10/30/2022	1378	367	1011	316	32	284	1062	335	727
03/24/23	1386	488	898	281	99	182	1105	389	716

*Initial number of on-time applicants was 1170. Total number grew because we allowed late applications.

2023-24 Expansion plan

In the winter of 2023, the Department crafted a new plan which focused on a few key sites to pilot a new stable staffing structure (anchoring classrooms with full time teachers) to expand afterschool seats. The plan includes combining programs at the King Open building, adding 4th & 5th grade seats to the Youth Centers, and expanding seats at 2 Community Schools sites.

For fall 2023 DHSP will add 170 seats by expanding at 7 targeted sites. This will require adding 13 new teaching positions to help stabilize staffing and create a more sustainable structure. The City has contracted with a professional staff recruitment firm to help find and screen applicants for these new positions as well as for open Program Director roles.

Program	Expansion site	Additional seats	Description
Community Schools	Cambridgeport	40	Add 4 classrooms of 20 students
	Morse	40	Hire 6 new lead teachers
King Open Extended Day	King Open	30 (130 KOED, plus 60 Community Schools, plus 30 new)	Roll over 60 Community Schools seats at King Open to KOED program and add 1 additional classroom. Hire 3 new lead teachers
Youth Centers	All 4 sites	60	Add 60 4 th & 5 th grade seats across 4 sites. Hire 4 new lead teachers

Total: 170

An additional FT Inclusion Specialist will support the assessment of children with special needs, training for staff, as well as site-based program coaching. We are continuing to work on increasing the number of PT Inclusion Facilitators through our partnership with Lesley University and other outreach methods.

While we are excited about the potential of this model, this plan hinges on our ability to recruit and hire over 15 new full time staff as well as more part time staff in a tight labor market. We are hopeful that shifting to more full time vs. part time staff and engaging an external recruiting firm will help us achieve these targets. We also welcome the support and partnership of our community in sharing openings with qualified candidates.

In addition to the efforts to expand outlined above, DHSP is currently working with non-profit colleagues in the Cambridge OST community to expand the number of seats they are able to offer in September 2023 by providing City support for expanded service. Details of this work will be finalized in the coming weeks so that families can access the information.

Highlights for 2023-24 Application cycle

- As the Department engages in continuous improvement in response to caregiver feedback and to support high quality programming, the lottery for 2023-24 afterschool seats opened on May 1, 2023 (2 weeks earlier than last year). Families will be informed of their child(ren)'s acceptance into programs the week of June 19, 2023.
- This year's application is a single application for DHSP's Childcare Afterschool Program, Community Schools, and the Youth Centers.
- We have scheduled 5 in-person sessions to support families with applying to the lottery;
 - Monday, May 1, 8, 15, 22, 5-7:30 pm at DHSP 51 Inman St., 3rd Floor
 - Thursday May 11, 6-7:30 pm at Frisoli Youth Center

- Tuesday, May 18, 6-7:30 pm at Gately Youth Center

Additionally, a virtual session was offered on Thursday May 4 on Zoom.

This year families who are looking to re-enroll their children in the same site will receive priority for those seats to ensure continuity of care. The practice of re-enrolling existing children is a common practice for afterschool programs, and in fact, all of our programs re-enrolled children prior to 2021. We deliberately disrupted this practice when we launched the lottery system because part of our goal for initiating a lottery system was to address issues of access and equity. We did not want to continue to re-enroll existing families until we were able to reach parity with the school system around the number of low-income children who were enrolled. This past year we were able to reach that parity (we currently have 41% of those enrolled from households who earn less than 65% of the HUD median income) and have decided to re-instate this practice. We acknowledge this prioritizes continuity for students over increasing chances for new families to receive a spot. There will, however, be 170 total additional seats at expansion sites (King Open, Cambridgeport, Morse, 4 Youth Centers) increasing access for families overall. From 2021/2022 to 2022/2023, only ~60% of enrolled families re-applied. The proportion of re-enrollments might be higher this year as Covid may have led to more disruption for families last year than might be true for this year.

- Priority will still be given to low income and sibling applicants.
- We have re-designed our lottery webpage which now includes a place for families to provide direct feedback as well as links to other community-based afterschool programs.

Ongoing planning

Looking beyond fall of 2023, DHSP will continue to work with The Agenda for Children to map out a process to examine continued OST expansion opportunities across Cambridge. This includes working on a 3-year plan for DHSP expansion. We will need to examine the results of our current strategy to understand if this model is one that we should explore for growth or if we need to create a new strategy.

In response to diverse feedback from Cambridge families, DHSP is continuing to collaborate with caregivers to form a new community partnership that welcomes families into decision-making that impacts them – with a focus on centering voices of our most marginalized residents.

Additionally, as part of our continuous planning, we will work with Cambridge Public Schools leadership to explore space and expansion opportunities.