



# Department of Human Service Programs

*Ellen Semonoff, Assistant City Manager*

City of Cambridge  
51 Inman Street  
Cambridge, MA 02139-1102  
askdhsp@cambridgema.gov

voice: 617-349-6200  
tty: 617-492-0235  
fax: 617-349-6248

To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager  
From: Ellen Semonoff, Assistant City Manager for Human Services and Michelle Farnum, Assistant Director for Children, Youth and Families  
Date: June 6, 2024  
Re: City Council Order O-9 on Youth Center Tuition Rates

## **Background**

The Cambridge Youth Programs (CYP), a network of five Youth Centers, offer many high-quality programs that promote leadership and youth development through enrichment activities, unique experiences, and opportunities to develop relationships with adults and peers. The CYP Pre-teen / Middle School Afterschool Program, located at 4 Youth Centers, provides a safe and fun learning environment for youth in grades 4-8 and is licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). In the current school year, there are 355 Cambridge young people enrolled in CYP afterschool Programs (increased from 295 last year).

Since the Youth Centers were first licensed by EEC in 2000, the enrollment has been mostly made up of children from low-income households (over 80%). To support the inclusion of low-income children in Out-of-School-Time (OST) programs, the City heavily subsidized the tuition rates for the Youth Centers, making the yearly tuition cost between \$100-\$500.

Similarly, in response to the City Council & School Committee's 2009 Blue Ribbon Report on middle school youth participation in OST programs, "*Shared Youth Shared Strategies*", DHSP made tuition for middle school-aged youth (youth in grades 6-8) free to encourage ongoing participation.

## **Program Models and Equity Changes in DHSP**

DHSP offers 4 models of afterschool programs for children and youth in K-8<sup>th</sup> grade: Childcare Afterschool, Community Schools, King Open Extended Day and Cambridge Youth Programs. Each model offers something different: our Childcare Afterschool programs focus on project-based learning; our Community Schools include a variety of vendor-based enrichment classes; King Open Extended Day focuses on social-emotional learning; and Cambridge Youth Programs focus on leadership development, connection with peers and adults, and STEAM learning. However, all of our programs foster children's social-emotional learning and use positive relationships between adults and children to support that learning. We serve 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders across all 4 DHSP afterschool program models.

In 2021, DHSP rolled out several equity-based changes to its Community Schools afterschool programs beginning with a shared data system, a lottery placement system, and a new sliding-scale tuition system. Since the 2021-2022 school year, we have been rolling out additional changes to align all of the department's child and youth-serving afterschool programs: Community Schools, Childcare Afterschool, King Open Extended Day, and Cambridge Youth Programs. Through a single application process, lottery-

based enrollment system, and aligned tuition scales, our goal was to lower the barrier of access to our programs for families, particularly those who most often encounter barriers, and to increase enrollment of low-income families (households earning less than 65% of HUD Area Median Income) across DHSP's afterschool program ecosystem.

After implementing these equity-based changes, we saw immediate changes to the demographics of our programs. In the Community Schools, we saw an increase in the number of low-income families enrolled in Community Schools by threefold. In the Youth Centers, it was the opposite: the number of low-income families declined from approximately 80% to closer to 40%.

### **Tuition changes**

In recognition of these changes and to ensure consistent tuition rates across our afterschool programs, we had planned to change the Youth Center tuition rates for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders in CYP afterschool programs to be the same sliding scale tuition rates as our other DHSP afterschool programs beginning in the 2024-2025 school year. Tuition will continue to be free for 6-8<sup>th</sup> graders in CYP afterschool programs.

Our tuition rates are based on household income and family size and are deeply subsidized for families earning less than 65% of HUD Area Median Income. Additionally, our rates are comparatively affordable for all families based on other local rates – we are neither the cheapest nor the most expensive for families earning above 100% HUD AMI.

We believe that families enrolled in DHSP programs should pay tuition based on their income and household size, not based on the building in which they attend programming. All of our programs are staffed using the same 1:10 adult-child ratio and offer very similar, developmentally aligned programming including field trips, healthy snacks, guest teachers/vendors, and enrichment opportunities. Additionally, this past year, with the support of the City, we were able to convert 13 part-time positions into full-time positions to help stabilize our staffing. Four of the full-time positions are in the afterschool program in the Youth Centers.

In our communications and outreach for the 2024-2025 DHSP Afterschool Programs Lottery this spring, we emphasized that tuition rates are based on household size and income across our programs. We also sent notification to families currently enrolled in Cambridge Youth Programs in late fall 2023 and again in April 2024 to inform them of the intended changes.

We have heard from several families about the impact of the steep rate change, which impacts 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders enrolled in the Youth Centers. We agree that the change is especially challenging for families of currently enrolled 4<sup>th</sup> graders, who were used to paying the subsidized tuition rate. To support these families in having continuity of care and programming, we are proposing a change to mitigate the impact of implementing the aligned tuition rate for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders in the Youth Centers. We are planning to phase in the increase in tuition rates for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders in the Youth Center over the next year. Rather than increasing the rates in September 2024 to align them with the tuition across all of our other afterschool programs, we will reduce the increase in rates by 50%. For September of 2025, the aligned tuition rates will apply to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders in the Youth Centers. The charts below show

the income levels and tuition rates for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders in the Youth Centers and across our other programs for the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years.

We appreciate the perspectives of the families and the concerns of the City Council as we continue to create greater equity across all of our programs. We believe that phasing in the increase in rates for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders in our Youth Center Programs will move us in the right direction without overly burdening families in one year.

# For families with children entering Cambridge Youth Programs in 2024-2025, DHSP proposes setting rates at 50% of systemwide rates

- Families with students entering Cambridge Youth Programs afterschool programming will receive a smaller rate increase in the 2024-2025 school year.
- Families with students entering Cambridge Youth Programs afterschool programming in 2025-2026 will pay the systemwide rate.
- Approximately 85-90 households would receive the smaller rate increase for one year.
- This rate cut will reduce additional program revenue by approximately \$180k for the next fiscal year.

Students Enrolled in Cambridge Youth Programs Afterschool	Proposal for 2024-2025 Rates <sup>1</sup>	Proposal for 2025-2026 Rates <sup>1</sup>
4 <sup>th</sup> grade	\$153 per Month	\$306 per Month
5 <sup>th</sup> grade	\$153 per Month	\$306 per Month
6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Free	Free



1. For a four-person household earning income between \$119,401-\$149,300 (80-100% of median income) and enrolled 5 days per week.

Recent updates will bring Cambridge Youth Program’s Afterschool rates in line with systemwide rates starting in 2025-2026

**Proposed Monthly Afterschool Rate Changes by Program**

Income Band <sup>1</sup>	Cambridge Youth Programs (2024-2025)	Cambridge Youth Programs (2025-2026)	King Open Extended Day, Childcare Afterschool, & Community Schools
Less than \$37,325	\$6	\$12	\$12
\$37,326-\$52,255	\$23	\$45	\$45
\$52,256-\$74,650	\$32	\$65	\$65
\$74,651-\$97,045	\$69	\$138	\$138
\$97,046-\$119,400	\$85	\$169	\$169
\$119,401-\$149,300	\$153	\$306	\$306
\$149,301-\$179,160	\$183	\$367	\$367
\$179,161-\$223,950	\$229	\$459	\$459
\$223,951-\$298,600	\$306	\$612	\$612
Greater than \$298,600	\$382	\$764	\$764

Youth Programs rate increases will be phased in for the 2024-2025 school year

Youth Programs rates will align with the rest of the afterschool system starting in the 2025-2026 school year

