# Coffee and Conversation at Cambridgeport School

Cambridgeport School Library

Children

|

Adults

## Coffee and Conversation at Cambridgeport School

Sep 28, 2015

### $1-50

$

Byline

Liz Phipps Soeiro, School Librarian, Cambridgeport School Library, Cambridge, Mass.

Coffee and Conversation provides a monthly forum where families can engage over a cup of coffee with school administration, government officials, local nonprofit employees and others in the convenient and casual setting of the school library. The talks are held in the mornings so parents and caretakers can attend after dropping

their children off at school.

On weeks when we do not have a guest speaker, parents and caretakers are still invited for coffee. Having these weekly coffees just for parents and caretakers helps me learn which topics they are interested in discussing and allows for promotion of the next Coffee and Conversation guest through word of mouth.

## Advanced Planning

Through Coffee and Conversation, I aim for parents and caretakers to be able to answer the following questions:

- Who are the decision makers in the schools and city?
- How do I best engage with these people?
- What role as a citizen do I have in school and civic decisions?

Finding the right guests is imperative to the success of the program; you should invite speakers who are relevant to your school community. Given our parents' interest in school and city policy, my programming heavily consists of district administration, school committee members and city officials.

When I first began to develop Coffee and Conversation, I had to spend some time searching for the right official for the right conversation. I did this by searching both our city's and district's websites while focusing on several questions: Who did what? How could they help our school population? Were their positions relevant to hot topics circulating in our school? From there, I would email individuals, explain who I was and what my program's goals were, and extend an invitation. The majority of people invited have come into the library to have a cup of coffee and engage with families.

## Marketing

Keeping a consistent schedule is important to the program's success. Due to my own fixed schedule, I know when I have classes every week. At the beginning of the school year, I look for about an hour of time right after morning drop-off and choose

the day that is most viable.

I frequently post on my school’s social media platforms about upcoming guests. I also find putting up posters and utilizing whiteboards and chalkboards with guest information is an easy and effective form of communication. Our school's PTO also sends emails and notices home about upcoming guests. Optimally, I announce a guest about two weeks prior to their appearance, which feels like enough time to plan ahead for, but not too much time to forget all about it.

## Budgeting

The cost of Coffee and Conversation is very low. Guests have been extremely gracious and I have never had to compensate them for their time. People from the community tend to be happy to give back to their community. Politicians, committee members and administrators are very interested to hear what their constituents have to say, and it is well worth their time.

The only money I have spent for this program is for coffee, cream, sugar and the occasional breakfast snack. Even so, those costs are very low. I have found caregivers are happy to occasionally donate a pound of coffee, a carton of cream or some scones.

## Day-of-event Activity

The day of the event, I or a parent volunteer will do some last-minute marketing — such as a brief announcement over the intercom — letting people know who the guest is or that there is a pot of coffee waiting in the library. Someone will also stand in the school’s doorway as students and families enter and direct caretakers to the library for programming.

Before we begin, I spend a few moments with the guest to see if there is anything in particular they feel should be part of the morning’s conversation, if they have time constraints, or any other questions or concerns. After introductions, the conversation usually flows organically, often taking a Q & A format.

## Program Execution

In general, the program has been a great addition to our community. I now have city officials contacting me for the opportunity to speak at the library. Parents will ask for specific guests to come in. Coffee and Conversation not only caffeinates, but also educates; I see families more informed on how decisions are made, who makes them, and their own roles in shaping those decisions.

One benefit I did not expect was how families' relationship to the library would change. By just spending time in the school library, many caretakers began to make use of both the library materials and my professional knowledge in a much more real and consistent way.

## Advice

I try to cast the large net by holding Coffee and Conversation in the morning, when many families are already in the building for drop-off; however, I am not able to reach or accommodate everyone. I do find that announcing guests a couple of weeks in advance allows for some caretakers who may not normally attend to plan to make arrangements.

One reason Coffee and Conversation has been so successful is due to the fact that my school's principal and PTO believe that the program is beneficial to our community. Their support has allowed me to take the time to develop the program and invite people into the school. Make sure you sit down with your building administrator and caretakers in your school to let them know why a similar program would be beneficial to your school community.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

## Supporting Materials

Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

## Slideshow Images





## More Programs

Jun 21, 2012
Young Adult (17 - 20)+ |
Image



## Intergenerational Dessert and Discussion

### Audiences:

Audience
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Jun 17, 2010
Children (9 and under)+ |
Image



## Collaboration @ Your School Library

### Audiences:

Audience
Children (9 and under)
Sep 15, 2015
Adults (21 and up)+ |
Image




## Getting Started with the Harwood Approach

### Audiences:

Audience
Adults (21 and up)