

## Riley, Kate

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**From:** Zoe Lentz [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, January 26, 2020 6:02 PM  
**To:** City Council; Riley, Kate; City Manager  
**Subject:** Letter in Support of the Tobin School/VLUS Project and Early Education Opportunities to be Increased in Cambridge

Dear Mayor Siddiqui, Vice-Mayor Mallon, City Councillors and City Manager:

We are writing in support of the Tobin School/VLUS project. Cambridge has a unique opportunity in this moment: to not only build a net-zero school, but also to address increasing enrollment in our public schools and move us forward in our quest for universal preschool. This is a matter of equity in our city, and we should embrace it!

We are the parents of a young son (born July 2016), who just began Special Start JK at the Cambridgeport School in September 2019. We have had our own journey. At 18 months our pediatrician (knowing we are a bilingual family and my husband a non-native basic English speaker was the primary caregiver) suggested speech pathology and/or Early Intervention. We began working with a private speech pathologist in June 2018 at 23 months and then Early Intervention in Feb 2019. We had been wait listed for the 3-year old lottery, so decided to pursue the route of an IEP to see if he qualified for a spot in Cambridge Public Schools. We were hopeful that the right environment and additional services would help with the progress we were making with his speech delay. We are a mixed race family: myself an American born overseas in Saudi Arabia who grew up on a company compound on the Persian Gulf and my husband, an artist, dancer and drummer from Kaolack, Senegal. We have had different lives, similar in some and vastly different in others. One major difference is our education. I attended a community based pre-school run in the company compound, then K-8 at the company run school (based in American curriculum), followed by a private boarding school, Westminster School in Simsbury, CT and then again private college, WPI in Worcester, MA. My husband however attended no formal school, speaks the Senegalese dialect, Wolof, that is predominately verbal and incorporates some French vocabulary words, and therefore has struggled to learn to read and write in his own language and then English. He is however a talented artist and a father that can teach our son many other lessons from life. My husband is very motivated and I often see that if he had had the skills that I was taught through out my educational career he would be successfully reaching all the opportunities and life goals of his desire.

Our son may not benefit from the additional seats this new school will provide, perhaps maybe in his following educational years prior to high-school. But my thoughts are also for the families in my community whose lives would be changed by having greater increased access to free or affordable preschool choices. We know that high-quality early education is vital to a child's long-term academic success. As a city, we have been discussing this issue for years. And yet we still have many families who are unable to access those opportunities for their own children, through the luck of their birthdays or lottery numbers. As I'm sure you know, private preschool options in the area are simply out of reach for many families. As I shared in our personal notes in the above paragraph, my husband's and my educational differences have a great impact on our socioeconomic status. Until recently, we were a single-income family. And now that my husband has returned to work post-child, we have incomes that match our respective education, skills and occupation. I know that there are other families with similar experiences, I see Cambridge as a city with many cultural influences, as my own multi-cultural family started by the meeting of my husband and I right here in Central Square. With that said, Cambridge now has a great opportunity to move us closer to truly providing equal educational opportunity in this city that we again, should embrace.

We know that opposition has been raised because of concerns regarding traffic and the number of children who would be served at this location. As with everything, we have to ask ourselves what we want to prioritize. Is congestion during limited hours more important than early childhood education? When we say "there will be too many children in this building," what does that mean for the families whose children we refuse to make room for? Of course, we must be

diligent to address unintended consequences and make sure that we minimize impact on the immediate community, but the highest priority should be providing our children and families with equal opportunity for success. We talk often about an achievement gap in our public schools, but what we really have is an opportunity gap. It begins in preschool, and we have the chance to move toward closing it. Let's have the courage as a community to do just that, and ensure that all our children have access to a high quality, affordable, early childhood education experience.

Thank you for your attention,  
Zoe Lentz, Cheikh & Talla Ngom