



AD HOC COMMITTEE TO DEVELOP AN ADVOCACY STRATEGY

**November 6, 2018, 4:30 pm
Trustees' Committee Room
133 Greenbank Road
Ottawa, Ontario**

Members: Lynn Scott , Christine Boothby, Theresa Kavanagh, Keith Penny, Erica Braunovan, Shirley Seward

Staff: Michele Giroux (Executive Officer of Corporate Services), Katrine Mallan (Manager of Board Services), Nicole Guthrie (Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Call to Order

Chair Braunovan called the meeting to order at 4:40 p.m.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Trustee Seward,

THAT the agenda be approved.

-Carried-

3. Matters for Discussion:

3.1 Response to Ministry Consultation

The provincial government launched a consultation on education reform in Ontario on 28 September 2018. The consultation asks for participants' input on a variety of subjects including:

- Improving Ontario students' performance in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM);
- Preparing students with job skills, including skilled trades or fields, such as coding;
- Graduating students with life skills like financial literacy;
- Providing age-appropriate health and physical education curriculum that includes subjects like mental health, sex-education, and legalization of cannabis;
- Improving standardized testing;

- Banning cell phone use in the classroom; and
- Developing a parents' bill of rights.

The government has provided for three methods for parent engagement: an online submission, an online survey and telephone town halls. The consultation closes on 15 December 2018.

The members, using the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) Consultation Resource for the Ministry of Education's Consultation: Education in Ontario, discussed the how the District may choose to respond.

Executive Officer Giroux advised that the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) hosted a session on the Ministry Consultation at the recent Parent Conference. Over 20 parents attended the session which was facilitated by the PIC members.

Staff and trustees observed and participated in the session. Executive Officer Giroux and Trustee Penny provided the following observations on parent input:

- Parents found it difficult to engage in the discussion on Improving Ontario students' performance in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) but encouraged the addition to the arts and revising the acronym to Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math (STEAM);
- Parents were concerned about the political element and strongly believed in increased funding for improvements to critical thinking skills and apprenticeship;
- Parents expressed concern over the Parents' Bill of Rights and the Ministry documents related to it. Some saw a sample Bill of Rights from a Christian Reform group in the United States which was troubling;
- Parents queried the demand for a Parents' Bill of Rights and the rationale for its creation. They sought a comparison to current rights and queried whether or not the Parents' Bill of Rights would be produced by the Ministry or would boards be asked to develop it;
- Parents discussed the Health and Physical Education curriculum. Opinions were varied and the conversation was heated at times, there was no consensus on the issue;
- Some parents did not know what the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) was. Many were in favour of eliminating it;
- Parents felt that the issue of financial literacy was important enough to warrant it being a separate curriculum item;

- Parents expressed concern over the Parents' Bill of Rights and queried the types of elements that may be included and whether or not there is a need. Many did not know their current rights and where that information exists for their review; and
- The parents disliked the open-ended questions and felt that it will be difficult for the Ministry to provide qualitative results.

Trustee Seward expressed interest in the variety of viewpoints observed in the discussion on the health and physical education curriculum noting that the Board came together to prepare and issue a statement regarding their common belief that the 2015 curriculum was appropriate to 21st century learners.

Members discussed the Parents' Bill of Rights and noted that there are existing mechanisms and the Board has a comprehensive complaints' resolution policy. Hearing that parents still have limited knowledge of the policy would indicate that further communication of the policy is required.

Trustee Scott expressed the view that providing a District response will not be simple. She noted the diverse communities and opinions that exist across the District. She encouraged the members to provide their own perspective based on knowledge of their communities rather than amend and reuse the OPSBA response.

Trustee Braunovan expressed the view that the Board should make a submission to the Ministry consultation and ensure that the submission is made public. She noted that the importance of transparency and ensuring that the community is also apprised of the District response.

Executive Officer Giroux noted that the Board may choose to make a submission in a format other than what the Ministry have prescribed. She suggested that the Board respond to each of the topics in the consultation and provide an additional summary statement as a separate submission.

Trustee Scott advised that given the timing of the required submission, a special Board meeting would be required. She added that the advocacy work with local MPPs does not have a deadline and that the document prepared by the Board in response to the Ministry Consultation can be used as a focus for a discussion with MPPs in early January.

It will be important that the District provide information to parents on the consultation well before the deadline.

During the discussion of the Ministry Consultation categories, the following points were noted:

Topic 1: Improving student performance in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)

- Trustee Penny noted his support for the OPSBA submission on this topic and suggested that the Arts committee be consulted for specific, District focused content;
- Executive Officer Giroux advised that the District response to this topic be based on the need for school resources;
- Trustee Boothby noted that resource allocations are important and that students need the ability to pursue STEM in flexible spaces and groupings. Students need more mentoring opportunities. Additional resources and funding for clubs and the provision of hands on opportunities should be made available for all students;
- Trustee Seward expressed concern that social sciences are not addressed;
- Executive Officer Giroux suggested that consideration could be given to the social science and humanities through an additional bullet. She noted the committee may wish to focus on the OCDSB exit outcomes, in particular the development of critical thinking skills;
- Trustee Scott expressed concern over the acronyms of STEM and STEAM and worried that a focus solely on these subject areas does little to promote learning all subjects. She added that she would suggest enhanced collaborative opportunities with local post-secondary organizations particularly in technology and the skilled trades;
- The quality of OCDSB graduates is high due to the District's focus on the development of critical thinking skills and this should be highlighted in the response; and
- Trustee Braunovan expressed the view that an Arts element is important as it speaks to creativity and innovation which are important elements of STEM.

Topic 2: Preparing students with needed job skills, such as skilled trades and coding

- Members queried the grouping of coding with skilled trades;
- Trustee Penny advised that partnerships with post-secondary and trade organizations be part of the District response;
- Executive Officer Giroux noted that it would be advisable to seek the input of Reg Lavergne on the issue of student success and Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) renewal. She suggested that gaps in existing infrastructure and required resources be identified to optimize learning in trades;
- Trustee Seward expressed the view that topics 1 and 2 are related and that it is important that students have balance and that there must be an emphasis on the soft skills of collaboration and teamwork. She

noted that the District's approach and focus on exit outcomes could be used to influence a provincial approach;

- Executive Officer Giroux noted that the work force is changing and that some large employers are now more concerned with critical thinking skills, highlighting the IBM Skills Gateway program. The IBM Digital Badges are reinventing how credentials are used to recognize achievement and contribution;
- Trustee Boothby advised that all post-secondary program options be similarly valued and respected; and
- Trustee Penny noted that many of today's graduates will not have just one job and that students must be prepared as skills and requirement change. Today's students must be resilient and able to adapt to change.

Topic 3: Improving provincial standardized testing

- The members agreed there is a place for standardized testing. The District has now undertaken the task of collecting racialized data and should the EQAO be removed there would be nothing to measure the data against;
- Trustee Seward suggested the District response should address the modernization of the EQAO with an emphasis on performance, student voice and cultural relevancy; and
- Testing is important and can identify issues. The data must be utilized as justification for modification of curriculum.

Topic 4: Ensuring students graduate with important life skills, including financial literacy

- Trustee Seward expressed the view that financial literacy is not an add-on and should be incorporated into math and other subject areas;
- Manager Mallan noted that a response might contain suggestions of specific skills i.e. managing household budgets, savings, personal finance and home economics;
- Trustee Scott expressed the view that financial literacy does not belong within the math curriculum and noted that it may be better suited as a part of the health and physical education curriculum with a link to healthy living as it relates to managing life and finances;
- Trustee Braunovan suggested careers as an alternative location within the curriculum; and
- Trustee Kavanagh advised on the importance of teaching students financial literacy sighting the growing concern and threat of pay day loan companies.

Topic 5: Managing the use of technology in classrooms, such as cell phones

- Cell phone use in the classroom should not be banned and students must be educated in the appropriate use of cell phones and screen time management;
- Cell phones, if used properly, can enhance the education experience;
- A response could include reference to resources, highlighting the fact that if sufficient technology was available in the classroom, cell phones would not be required; and
- The issue of cell phone management could be addressed through local policy and individual teacher positions.

Topic 6: Building a new age-appropriate Health and Physical Education Curriculum

- The 2015 curriculum is sufficient but must be updated to include the legalization of cannabis, gambling addictions, tobacco use, the me-too movement, and a stronger emphasis on physical education; and
- Executive Officer Giroux noted that a District response may reference mental health supports as a part of well-being, funding for more after-school activities as well as the expansion of the urban priorities program.

Topic 7: Developing the first-ever Parents' Bill of Rights

- Trustee Kavanagh expressed the view that a District response can focus on the value and importance of trustees as they often speak with parents and provide assistance on a variety of issues. Another element of a District response could be a focus on the teachers college and the quality of teachers and mechanisms to support qualified teachers;
- Trustee Scott advised that parent's rights are embedded in many different pieces of existing legislation and school board district policies. She expressed the view that a solution must include a way to ensure more parents are able to access the appropriate documents when they have questions and to ensure the District can support their requests. A parent friendly, accessible platform is required;
- Trustee Penny highlighted the importance of the relationship between the school and parents and felt a Parents' Bill of Rights may upset the balance and impact local partnerships;
- Trustee Boothby suggested that every District in the province have a parent portal as a part of their website and that it should be a one stop shop for parents. She noted that there may be issues with cultural translation and understanding as many parents, particularly newcomers, feel as if they have no rights at all;

- Executive Officer Giroux noted that a District response may include reference to the funding and development of an online parent portal. She added that the French School Boards have a high-end solution and it was produced collectively, a similar approach may work for the public boards; and
- Equitable parental access is a primary concern.

Additional Feedback

- Support for the continuation of the Truth and Reconciliation curriculum revision writing sessions;
- The notion of the one school system;
- Reference to Ontario Regulation 274. Hiring practices must change to ensure that the staff structure within Ontario schools is reflective of the population of the District; and
- Use and modify the key priorities the Board produced as part of its advocacy work in 2017-2018. These recommendations included: sustainable capital funding, the provision of high-quality accessible child care, the autonomy of school boards and the availability of French teachers.

4. New Business -- Information and Inquiries

There was no new business.

5. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:03 p.m.

Erica Braunovan, Chair, Ad Hoc Committee to Develop an Advocacy Strategy