



ADVOCACY STRATEGY COMMITTEE

February 13, 2024, 5:00 pm
Zoom Meeting

Members: Alysha Aziz, Nili Kaplan-Myrth, Cathryne Milburn, Amanda Presley, Lynn Scott

Staff Present Pino Buffone (Director of Education), Michèle Giroux (Executive Officer, Corporate Services), Teri Adamthwaite (General Manager, Finance), Diane Pernari (General Manager, Communications & Public Relations), Darcy Knoll (Communications Advisor), Nicole Guthrie (General Manager, Board Services), Sue Baker (Committee Coordinator)

1. Call to Order

Chair Aziz called the meeting to order at 5:03 p.m.

2. Acknowledgement of Territorial Lands

Chair Aziz acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on unceded Algonquin Homelands and thanked the Algonquin Nations for their stewardship of the land since time immemorial.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were filed.

4. Approval of the Agenda

**Moved by Trustee Presley,
THAT the agenda be approved.**

Carried

5. Matters for Action:

5.1 Approval of Advocacy Briefs

Your Committee had before it for approval, draft advocacy briefs for Mental Health and Well-Being, Special Education, Transportation, Replacement Worker Costs, Capital Funding, and Protecting Schools from Cyberthreats.

Executive Officer Giroux introduced the advocacy briefs and acknowledged the work of those who drafted the documents. She noted

that the briefs focus on key practical recommendations and address some of the nuances. The briefs will be consolidated into an advocacy kit for distribution to different audiences in the context of political realities. They will also inform the budget process and be used for informal and formal advocacy efforts.

Committee members expressed their satisfaction with the documents and suggested a few changes for improvement.

During discussion of the briefs, the following points were noted:

Mental Health and Well-Being:

- Trustee Kaplan-Myrth expressed the view that it would not be helpful to compare data from 2019 and 2021 since it is now 2024. She also suggested that a reference to "1Call1Click.ca" be added to assist families in finding mental health resources for children and youth in Ottawa.

Special Education:

- Trustee Kaplan-Myrth noted some grammatical errors in the first part of the document. She also noted that the document speaks about the need for supports for learning disabilities and special needs as well as the need for educational assistants and suggested that something be included with respect to other supports besides educational assistants; and
- Trustee Scott suggested that the brief not speak specifically about children on the Autism Spectrum Disorder, but rather address the significant rise in dysregulated behaviour in schools and increased demand for special education support.

Transportation:

- Trustee Scott drew attention to the more than 10% of students who do not have access to public transportation. This does not include students attending specialized classes that are not in their home schools. She noted that the bus driver shortage has significantly impacted students residing in rural areas and suggested that emphasis be placed on how much of the District is rural and the long bus rides for many students;
- Trustee Dr. Nili Kaplan-Myrth suggested a specific number of students and families without access to school transportation be added to demonstrate the significant impact;
- Executive Officer Giroux noted that transportation funding should recognize the service delivery options in the community rather than directing a model that does not reflect the vehicles that are available; and

- Trustee Scott submitted that the Board's advocacy efforts should be directed to municipal and provincial government to provide additional funding for student transportation.

Moved by Trustee Presley,

That the advocacy briefs for Mental Health and Well-Being, Special Education, Transportation, Replacement Worker Costs, Capital Funding, and Protecting Schools from Cyberthreats be approved, as amended.

Carried

6. Matters for Discussion:

6.1 Strategy/Next Steps

Executive Officer Giroux outlined the following next steps that could be taken for the use of the advocacy briefs:

Prepare an information kit that includes all advocacy briefs;

- Send the kit and a cover letter to the Minister of Education, copied to area Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs), requesting a meeting with the Minister to discuss the issues and propose solutions;
- Request a meeting with local NDP and Liberal MPPs to discuss the briefs with the Chair, Vice-Chair and Chair of the Advocacy Committee. It was noted that the Chair, on behalf of the Board, has already made a presentation to local Conservative MPPs at the provincial Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and they will also receive a copy of the kit and letter to the Minister;
- Send a letter from the Chair to the Ontario Public School Boards Association (OPSBA) to advise them of the Board's advocacy efforts. The Board may also consider submitting a recommendation to the OPSBA Annual General Meeting;
- Request the Director of Education to share the advocacy briefs with other directors of education at a Council of Directors of Education (CODE) meeting;
- Send a letter to the Mayor of Ottawa and City Councillors to seek their support and keep them informed;
- Share the advocacy briefs with the Committee of the Whole Budget and the Board's advisory committees;
- Post the briefs on the Engage OCDSB page of District's website and invite public comment; and

- Include information about the brief in weekly newsletters to staff, school councils, students and parents/caregivers.

During discussion of the proposed next steps, the following points were noted:

- The elementary (ETFO) and secondary (OSSTF) federations are also advocating with the Ministry on behalf of their members, and they may wish to include some of the Board's advocacy issues along with their own issues;
- The briefs will be finalized and made available to the 20 February 2024 meeting of the Committee of the Whole Budget; and
- With respect to a suggestion that the District use social media platforms to convey information about funding shortfalls, Executive Officer Giroux cautioned against extracting information without providing context that could have unintended consequences.

The Committee members expressed their support for the proposed plan of action.

7. New Business -- Information and Inquiries

There was no new business.

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:58 p.m.

Alysha Aziz, Chair, Advocacy Strategy Committee