INDIGENOUS EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

September 19, 2019
6:00 pm
Gloucester High School
2060 Ogilvie Road
Ottawa, Ontario

Members: Albert Dumont, Sytukie Joamie, Nina Stanton, Inini McHugh, Anthony Debassige, Romaine Mitchell, Sebastien Pilon , Jesse Paypompee-Kavanaugh, Lili Miller, Raiglee Alorut, Jordyn Hendricks

Staff and Guests: Chris Ellis (Trustee), Wendy Hough (Trustee), Lynn Scott (Lynn Scott), Ganaaboute Gagne (Student Trustee), Dorothy Baker (Superintendent of Instruction), Jody Alexander (Vice-Principal), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Dr. Petra Duschner (Manager Mental Health and Critical Services), Kris Meawasige (Indigenous Student Support and Re-engagement Coordinator), Chantel Verner (Instructional Coach), Leigh Fenton (Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Opening

Vice-Principal Alexander called the meeting to order at 6:12 pm.

Albert Dumont offered an opening.

2. New Business

2.1 Open Discussion and Recommendations

Superintendent Baker introduced Leigh Fenton, who will attend meetings to maintain a written record of the discussions held within the circle. She invited the group to introduce themselves.

Transportation Discussion: Inini McHugh expressed concern about Indigenous students on cross-boundary transfers who are no longer eligible for Presto passes. He asked that the Board policy be revised to ensure that any Indigenous student can access free OC Transpo services. Inini noted that he has leveraged the Education Foundation to support the transportation of three students. Superintendent Baker confirmed that Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA) is responsible for all home to school transportation on behalf of the District.

Recommendation: Trustee Scott volunteered that Policy P.077.PLG Designated Schools/Student Transfers stipulates students who are not attending a school in their boundary are not generally eligible for transportation, unless they are enrolled in a Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM). This policy may be revised if a recommendation came forth from the Indigenous Education Advisory Council.

Approval of the Agenda Discussion: Sytukie Joamie spoke in favour of reordering the agenda to place "new business" first upon the opening of the meetings. He suggested the minutes of the previous meeting along with other Board priorities, be placed last on the agenda. This way the topics on the forefront of the minds of council members may be heard.

Recommendation: Superintendent Baker stated that there is space for these topics on the agenda. Advance notice is preferred, but not necessary. The council agreed on the change.

Teaching in OCDSB Lodges Discussion: Sytukie Joamie proposed that once a week local elders and knowledge keepers be invited to share oral traditions with the students in the lodge. Information passed down through oral history, customs and traditions encompasses beliefs, values, worldviews, languages and spiritual ways of life. These elders and knowledge keepers should be paid appropriately for this service to the community. He commented that when he hears a student speak in their own language, he knows that a young person has heard a story from a relative. This is a way for the culture to continue.

The discussion on proper use of lodges involved the following points:

- Opportunities should exist for other students in schools without lodges to be able to travel to hear the guest speaker;
- Student-led sessions could be incorporated into the lodge speaker-series;
- When Elders are visiting Ottawa on a Health Canada invitation, a partnership may be formed where the District can provide compensation in order for an additional intervention in the schools;
- Encourage and promote independent student smudging in lodges; and
- The Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition has recognized a large group of elders and knowledge keepers who are available for speaking engagements on their website. The District was part of a "stand-up ceremony" in June 2019 to establish a pool of teaching elders and traditional teachers to bring forth to the Ontario College of Teachers.

Recommendation: Trustee Ellis suggested that should the council make a formal recommendation to the Board to facilitate regular teaching

sessions in lodges, remuneration could be considered. Recommendations to the Board generally include the financial implications associated with the proposal.

Teaching Life Skills Discussion: Inini McHugh explained that he works with the 40% of the children who are not graduating and a life skills program would help. A student supported the concept, noting when students took a course on 'workplace mathematics' they learned how to write a cheque and complete their taxes, which were valuable teachings. Chantal Verner stated that life skills courses exist for the Alternative Schools and may be offered at other schools.

Recommendation: Inini McHugh recommended that life skills training be curriculum-based.

No Scent Policy for School Bus Drivers Discussion: Sytukie Joamie queried whether or not Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA) has a policy to prevent the school bus drivers from applying scents or perfumes, noting a health risk to those with respiratory issues.

Recommendation: Superintendent Symmonds recommended that one of the OCDSB representatives on the OSTA board, confirm the policy in place for drivers. Trustee Scott offered to verify the policy. If there a student suffering with an allergy, OSTA needs to be contacted immediately to discuss special care. The principal of the school should be made aware if there is a particular need.

The Single Day of Recognition for all Indigenous Peoples Discussion: Raigelee Alorut raised the prospect of having a special day for the Inuit population with drum dancing, apart from National Indigenous Peoples Day.

In discussion the following points were made:

- There are many Indigenous people in Ottawa with varying identities, not only Anishinaabe, Métis, First Nations, but other cultures too, for example Lakota. It is important that each group is represented differently with an appropriate teacher of the same band present and cultivating learning from heritage;
- Anthony Debassige stated that the traditions between the nations are vastly different. It is incumbent on the aboriginal people to educate non-Indigenous culture. The concept of one "Indigenous culture" is not legitimate, as each nation has their own specific culture;
- 'Welcome' plaques could be mounted in each District site, written in the language of the Algonquin nation; and

- Indigenous students are Indigenous every day and therefore a reflection upon ways to honour culture every day in our schools is required.

Recommendation: Superintendent Baker noted that further consideration is needed on how the District understands, supports and represents all nations. She summarized that it was important to be intentional about recognizing diversity within the celebration of National Indigenous Peoples Day.

Summary of New Business:

Vice Principal Alexander noted that while the suggestion to contact the principal is the protocol the District follows, this is a good example of a structure where the Board has policy in place but it is not necessarily accessible to Indigenous families. She highlighted the importance of remembering the past relationships between institutions and Indigenous peoples and to engage the District in assistance to remove barriers.

Superintendent Baker provided an inventory of the list of priorities that were discussed last year, provided in the annual report to the board, and in the new business portion of the agenda:

1. Transportation to be provided to all Indigenous students on a cross boundary transfer
2. Elder in Residence Program
3. Programs/Opportunities for students to develop life skills
4. Establish Inuktitut and Algonquin language learning opportunities
5. Establish smudging protocol for OCDSB sites
6. Improve cultural competency
7. Create safe spaces for First Nation, Métis and Inuit youth and staff in OCDSB sites
8. Support and encourage student-led presentations
9. Leverage data from community partners and adhere to Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) principles
10. Leverage technology to connect students across the District
11. Improve and resource mental health supports for First Nation, Métis and Inuit children and youth including intentionally connecting to culture
12. Emphasize learning about the complexities and diversity of First Nation, Métis and Inuit identities

13. Embed into curriculum and District environments, continuous learning and celebration of First Nation, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and ways of knowing

14. Establish Land Acknowledgement plaques in each District site

Trustee Hough indicated support for the change to the IEAC meeting agenda structure. She noted the importance of member voices and ensuring those voices are heard at the outset of each meeting.

3. Presentations

3.1 Memo 19-072, Draft Mental Health Strategy

Your council had before it Memo 19-072, seeking feedback on the draft Mental Health Strategy.

Superintendent Symmonds introduced the document noting the goal of approaching the council with the strategy is to develop a full understanding of identity and how it impacts the various areas that the District works within.

During the discussion and in response to questions, the following points were noted:

- Inini McHugh strongly suggested that in-school teams of social workers, psychologists, engagement workers and behavioral consultants be formed and include Indigenous people. This will encourage more Indigenous youth to choose counselling;
- Mental Health workers are required to not only be culturally aware but culturally competent;
- A student claimed that students are often reluctant to share information with a councillor who cannot relate to their life experience;
- Raigalee Alorut queried how non-Indigenous people presuppose to understand the impact of inter-generational trauma. She listed colonization, forced assimilation, mandated residential schools, the outlaw of cultural activities and ceremonies, dog slaughter, E-numbers, loss of land, loss of culture and languages, loss of identity, including pride and kinship with other Indigenous people. Despite the differences regarding the specific experiences of Indigenous peoples virtually all endured multiple traumatic events in their history. She highlighted that given their history of acute stress and trauma, her people have demonstrated enormous resilience and possess great inter-generational knowledge;

- Romaine Mitchell emphasized that if the mental health box is opened, the District must be prepared to genuinely help Indigenous students address their specific situations;
- Sytukie Joamie communicated that the word "strategy" is complex and alludes to a western education championing success. If the word 'strategy' is translated into Inuktitut, it might not be comprehensible. There are eight Inuit principles, that, if followed, is the spiritual pathway to a healthy life;
- The expression "times together" is preferred to the term "counseling";
- Sebastian Pilon recognized that part of Indigenous healing is facilitating a re-connection to cultural values and traditions; and
- Inini McHugh mentioned that on page 3 of the Mental Health Strategy, in the diagram modelling the School Mental Health Ontario 2019 Action Plan, there is no illustration of the culture component. Culture is crucial to securing mental health.

Chantal Verner expressed concern that as a teacher, she has witnessed guidance councillors overloaded with appointments and limited calendar availability. These councillors are the people on-site with the knowledge to obtain referrals for support. She believes that if this knowledge was conveyed to the teaching staff, they would be in a better position to assist students who are coming directly to them for support. These students should not have to continually share their story before adequate help is offered to them.

Dr. Dushner thanked the council for their input and will incorporate suggestions from the voices heard tonight into this plan for building and sustaining mentally healthy schools.

4. Approval the Minutes of 16 May 2019

The approval of the minutes was deferred.

5. Closing

Albert Dumont offered the closing.