

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

June 25, 2020
6:00 pm
Zoom Meeting

Members: Albert Dumont, Monique Manatch, Inini McHugh

Staff and Guests: Wendy Hough (Trustee), Lynn Scott (Trustee), Lyra Evans (Trustee), Justine Bell (Trustee), Chris Ellis (Trustee), Dorothy Baker (Superintendent of Instruction), Carolyn Tanner (Human Rights and Equity Advisor), Jody Alexander (Vice-Principal, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education), Ganaabouté Gagné (Student Trustee), Chantel Verner (Instructional Coach) Kris Meawasige (Indigenous Student Support and Re-engagement Coordinator), Kyl Morrison (Indigenous Graduation Coach), Romaine Mitchell, Nicole Parsons, Jo Van Hooser, Lili Miller, Gabrielle Fayant, Alexandra Dusome, Sara Petrucci, Roland Jones, Leigh Fenton (Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Opening

Vice-Principal Alexander called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m.

Albert Dumont opened the meeting with a teaching.

Superintendent Baker introduced Kyl Morrison, the District's new Indigenous Graduation Coach. She welcomed a new staff member, Carolyn Tanner, the Human Rights and Equity Advisor.

Mr. Mitchell congratulated the graduate students in the class of 2020.

Trustee Bell introduced herself as the new School Trustee Zone 10 for Somerset/Kitchissippi. She noted her travel to Ottawa from the Squamish Nation and announced that she was the great granddaughter of Indigenous activist and ally, Maisie Hurley and granddaughter to Kitty Bell-Sparrow.

2. Community Discussion

2.1 The Role of School Resources Officer

One Indigenous participant voiced that racism is evident in the enforcement of the law. When the police are brought into a school to deal with a student's behaviour, the perception of the situation in the eyes of the school community is tainted thereby changing the nature of the event into a criminalized occurrence.

She implored the District to consider the risks of re-opening schools in September with no further support in place to develop strong relationships with children. Guidance counsellors, social workers, community members trained in crisis intervention and mental health response are better suited to respond to student matters in ways which prioritize the safety of the children.

Inini McHugh noted that there are times when safety issues arise in schools. He was in favour of the work led by the Tragic Event Response Teams (TERT) which support students impacted by significant life events. TERT is a multidisciplinary group of people trained to provide psychological first aid to students in the event of a tragic incident. He suggested that a TERT response be initiated first before an School Resource Officer (SRO) is called to respond to a threat to the personal safety of students. The school administrators can call upon their community partners as well to help with a significant event, impacting multiple youth.

Student Trustee Gagne reviewed a section of the Student Trustee Bi-Annual Report presented to the Board of Trustees on 22 June 2020, suggesting a re-evaluation of the SRO program. Noting that there is not much Ottawa-specific data that illustrates student perspectives on the SRO program, he recommended that the District place the program on 'pause' and conduct a review of the program and the impact, both positive and negative, that it has on student populations. Staff should consider Board wide student consultations to allow staff and trustees access to statistics before making a decision. Any research which does not take place must be critical of abstract data, stories and experiences which can carry truths not seen in numbered analysis. Those surveyed should include all students, parents and staff. Student Trustee Gagne shared experiences of his student life where police officers have physically pulled him out of his classroom, thereby straining relationships with his teachers and peers.

Mr. Dumont thanked those who have contributed to the discussion and mentioned that all points of view must be respected. He explained that in the years he was at school, the SRO program was not in place. He would have asked them many questions to develop a better understanding of the service. This interaction may have assisted him into adulthood when he accepted more responsibilities within the community. As a human rights activist, he has been at odds with the police since 1993. In Ottawa there is a history of police officers abusing their authority and a great amount of trust has been lost as a result of the countless stories of the deaths of marginalized people at the hands of the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Despite this, Mr. Dumont expressed concern that young people are growing leery of a service in place to help keep the community safe. He recommended that if a student is untrusting of police that they sit in a circle with the officer who appears at their school, in an attempt to bring peace to their mind through sharing stories. He supported Student Trustee Gagne's idea of holding a referendum to gauge

who is in favour or against SROs in schools to ensure that the student voice was heard.

Ms. Verner volunteered that she has thirteen years of experience as a teacher previous to her current role as an Instructional Coach at the District. In those years she has seen a student stab another student, child pornography charges and assaults occur within the school building. There are times when the laws of living in a community are broken.

In her former school, the SRO assigned to the school attended social events in plain clothes and built authentic relationships with many students. She believes that when someone who wields authority is sensitive to a particular school's community, a partnership is beneficial. The cultural training that SROs receive must be re-examined.

Trustee Lyra Evans disclosed that she experienced homelessness for some of her teenage years where she bore witness to police acting disproportionately aggressively and violent towards racialized groups. Over-policing of marginalized communities is systematic racism. The District making a decision that communities who are disproportionately poor and racialized might require additional SROs is of concern and upholds systematic racism. She expressed gratitude to be able to listen to the council's experiences and appreciate the effort involved in sharing difficult stories.

Sara Petrucci (them/they) holds a Master's Degree in Curriculum, Leadership and Evaluation and Policy from the University of Ottawa, in addition to being a grade one teacher. In support of the end of public school relationships with OPS and the termination of the School Resource Officer, they cited the issue of racism within policing institutions is systemic, provincial and global. As a White settler student learning in the school system, they saw Black and Indigenous people being removed from classrooms and strip-searched in the school offices. The authority given to SROs is greater than a patrol officer, for example, the SRO does not require a warrant to search a student, only a reasonable suspicion to perform a search and seizure to turn up evidence of a violation of school policy or the law. SROs can access the personal information of students. SROs know where students live, they know their citizenship status and have access to their education records. It can be argued that this presence was created for the purposes of surveillance rather than a trusted official of the school.

Ms. Petrucci noted that in 2018 a study was undertaken by Carleton University called "Assigning Value to Peel Regional Police's School Resource Officer Program" where Peel Regional Police, the SROs, the administrators and students in five high schools participated in research. Though the findings in this study indicated that students felt an increased sense of safety through the SRO program, the relevance of this conclusion is questionable due to the fact that the sample size included the entire school. If a true examination of the SRO program were to occur, it would be important to focus on those students who are Black,

Indigenous, racialized, students accessing special needs resources, and children from low income families, who, generally feel vulnerable in the school environment.

In response to a question from the council, Superintendent Baker noted that a public live-stream video link to the Committee of the Whole Budget meeting for 2020-2021 is to be scheduled over the summer months. For this meeting Trustee Lyra Evans has provided a notice of motion to propose the redistribution of SRO funds to hiring a conflict mediator and a reconciliation officer in the same schools where the SROs were assigned. She recognized the five trustees attending the meeting, and listening to these multiple concerns and suggestions.

Superintendent Baker explained that the mandate of the SRO program in Ottawa within the four school boards was intended to be a relationship building, proactive program however, she added, this may not always be the case in some schools. The need for more information on the impacts of this program is evident.

Jo Van Hooser presented herself as the only Indigenous Children's Aid Society (CAS) worker in Ottawa. There was a time when CAS proposed a project where social workers and police officers could visit a family together. She spoke out against this program, citing the difficulty she alone encountered when attempting to earn the trust of her client families. She echoed the sentiment that the SRO program be abolished and instead welcomed the concept of inviting a Liaison Officer into the schools.

Vice Principal Alexander queried the selection process for the SROs and the kind of special training required to work with school-aged children. If one officer in one building is trusted by the school community, the rest of the officers on the police force must be held accountable for their actions outside schools and deemed trustworthy by all people.

She expressed concern with the surveillance conducted by police at rallies. She wishes to address the intent of the SRO program, versus the impact of the program. Two full time SROs are placed at Ridgemont High School and Gloucester High School, both with an enrollment of high numbers of racialized students and large Indigenous populations. She questioned who made this decision. Vice Principal Alexander inquired as to who precisely do the officers serve and protect.

A student (them/they) in the District contributed that they do not feel safe with police inside a school. In their experience, police officers uphold unjust laws often by violence, and targeting racialized youth. As someone who is female-passing, they are at risk of being harassed or sexually attacked by officers. This Indigenous person's female appearance places them in danger to go missing or be murdered, but history proves that in these cases, the chances of families and friends seeing justice for the crime is sparse.

The student stated that should the District continue the partnership with SROs, this affords the Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) another reason to distrust the school board. SRO funding should be redirected towards re-writing the curriculum, hiring mental health workers, inviting elders to the lodges to conduct justice circles and initiating harm-reduction programs.

They mentioned that some American cities are dissolving the police, rebuilding public order and turning to community-based alternatives. In the 1600s, The United States of America's primary policing institutions were slave patrols tasked with chasing down runaways and preventing slave revolts. In Canada, the RCMP were created for a specific purpose: to assert sovereignty over Indigenous people and their lands. The value of a police force was historically based on the idea that some people matter more than others. As a student, they do not want to play a game of "Russian roulette" as to whether the police officer assigned to their school is either "a good cop or a bad cop".

The student was perplexed by the District's plan to move forward to reduce disproportionate representation and thereby employ a greater number of Indigenous and Black professionals and teachers, yet in parallel, continue to partner with a police force, proven to be systematically racist. This student queried, of those employed by the District who are the decision makers, policy writers and hold school superintendency positions, how much room is made for BIPOCs. They concluded by noting that it is inherently racist to staff leadership positions with a majority of White people.

Student Trustee Gagne commented that the SRO program does not build relationships with students but the partnership only protects the policing institution. When the District protects the SRO program, they are actively discouraging students from attending classes and trusting the school board and the administration.

Gabrielle Fayant, co-founder of The Assembly of Seven Nations, introduced herself as a person who spends a lot of time gathering with Indigenous youth. She asked them if they would ever approach a police officer in their school with a question or an emergency and all of the young people said that they would never speak to a police officer willingly, under any circumstances. She wondered where the data was on any Indigenous youth engaging in a positive way with officers inside a school. She stated that when a school board serves its students, the student voice must be heard. She believes that youth are the experts of their lived experiences and the adults should be supporting their requests.

She established that there have been Indigenous and Black people killed in Ottawa by the OPS and it is important to acknowledge that murders at the hands of police happen in this city. There are a large number of unsolved cases involving missing and murdered Indigenous women in Ottawa. The lives of Indigenous people are not considered a priority.

In the youth-led organization where she works, they have not had to call police for assistance, except for in one situation where a member of staff was sent a death threat on her voice mail by a White member of society. The police were called and nothing was done to protect the female Indigenous victim. Subsequently, the organization was forced to move to a new location.

Many members of council agreed that SROs should not ever be or have been permitted to bring lethal weapons on school property. The council was largely in accord: systematic racism within the police force must be addressed before SROs are invited to safely come back into the schools.

Superintendent Baker established that there will be an opportunity for the public to make a delegation on the subject of SROs at the Committee of the Whole Budget meeting. Board Services will share information with IEAC on the process to make a public delegation to the Board of Trustees.

Student Trustee Gagne raised the importance of continuous student representation where at every meeting there is an Algonquin student, a non-Algonquin student, an Inuit student and a Métis student. This is a subject he and other students made prominently in emailed correspondence for many years however there has been no resolve to-date. It was not until 2019-2020 when he became a student trustee that he began to receive all of the invitations for the advisory committees. He worked hard this year to place phone calls to Indigenous students to ask them to attend the IEAC meetings. There are 3,000 Indigenous students enrolled in the District. More students must be invited to the meeting and the membership reviewed. Youth are the ones closest to the creator and they bring a different perspective to the circles, as do the Elders, and this should be honoured.

Superintendent Baker acknowledged the work of Student Trustee Gagne and the valuable perspective he has brought to the discussions over the years.

3. Presentation

3.1 Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap

Superintendent Baker illustrated that the draft Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap (The Roadmap) has incorporated many of the suggestions put forth by IEAC over the years and is foundational in policy expectations around Indigenous Education. She and Vice Principal Alexander are hoping to hear feedback from the council. In late September, or early October, The Roadmap will be circulated to the Board of Trustees.

She provided an outline of the contents within the proposed Roadmap, citing the three sections contained within the document: Section 1. Securing Accountability, which holds the District accountable to dismantle the systemic and structural barriers; Section 2. Indigenous Education Roadmap, which highlights the importance of identity, building capacity, in addition to staff and student

representation and Section 3. Human Rights and Equity Roadmap, which features programming and support for students.

She highlighted a number of structures being changed within the District:

- 'Indigenous Education' and 'Equity and Diversity' now stand as a separate service portfolio under review;
- To establish and implement a cyclical review of OCDSB policies and procedures applying an Indigenous, human rights and equity lens;
- To review Safe Schools policy and procedures including practices around police engagement with schools;
- To review and update policy, roles and responsibilities of Advisory Committees/Councils to ensure diverse representation;
- To establish Student Equity Advisory Committee;
- To expand the annual Indigenous Education Report on funding allocations and outcomes of goals identified for the Board Action Plan for Indigenous Education ;
- To develop and implement an Equitable Recruitment Strategy for Indigenous staff to increase representation at all levels of the organization;
- To conducting an external equity audit; and
- To develop a comprehensive professional learning plan tied to specific goals, actions and measurable outcomes to engage Trustees, senior staff, and school leaders in anti-racism, anti-oppression, human rights and Indigenous Education for system and school change, to be included in Annual Director's Report.

The Indigenous Education Roadmap section was crafted around the five themes identified from the community focus groups in the *Valuing Voices - Identity Matters!* survey, an identity-based data collection (IBDC) survey rolled out during the 2019-2020 school year: The Importance of Identity, Staff Awareness, Representation, Programming for Students, and Connectedness.

One member of Council noted that in expanding the cultural spaces in school, it is important to ensure that Métis and Inuit, along with the Algonquin Nations are represented.

In response to a query about the mandatory bias training and whether this was a program in place for everyone or only White people, Superintendent Baker responded that currently Diversity, Equity and Inclusion foundational training is mandatory for all staff; however, other opportunities to further study anti-racism, anti-oppression, human rights and Indigenous Education are to be offered.

Ms. Verner advised that schools must have the funds in place to support the honorariums required to support the Indigenous programming.

Mr. Morrison suggested that further work is required to train teachers on the potential outcomes of the grade 11 English courses: Contemporary First Nations,

Metis and Inuit Voices (NBE3U) instruction for non-indigenous students as compared to Indigenous students.

In response to a query which related to how youth were consulted on this document, Superintendent Baker explained that the resources from this document included the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, amongst other monumental policies to be listed in the bibliography. Over three years, student focus groups, community members and parents were consulted on the direction of The Roadmap. The previous annual IEAC reports were a source of information to adapt the council's ideas into plans for action.

Mr. McHugh stated that all Indigenous students are considered 'at risk' youth. He advocated for IEAC to be able to review the aggregated data on self-identified Indigenous students and where that particular group of people sits in the current environment for example, experience in school, mental health issues, emotional well-being, experience of stereotyping, prejudice or discrimination. After the barriers and biases are analyzed for Indigenous students, the District will be better equipped to direct the funding to immediate supports. She noted the IBDC questionnaires will be further examined by The Research, Evaluation and Analytics Division (READ) in the next set of reports.

Vice Principal Alexander noted that the Board Plan for Indigenous Education is a three year plan and the efforts on these initiatives follow reporting goals. It is important to realize that the Indigenous Education Team has only just begun the work. She welcomes feedback in the form of emailed correspondence or a phone call.

Mr. Mitchell has spoken to his cohorts within the provincial government on the Council's activities and his description of the IEAC is that of "a lighthouse". The Inuit Elder's circle has performed groundbreaking work in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, Ottawa Catholic School Board (OCSB) and the Ontario College of Teachers. He illustrated that whenever you are walking through a wooded area for the first time, it is never a straight path and there will always be obstacles to overcome. The COVID-19 pandemic has modified their program and slowed progress. A community call-out has been prepared for the Ottawa region to accept applications for Inuktitut language speakers to have their portfolio reviewed by the circle. He thanked Superintendent Baker and the team, Shelley Montgomery at the OCSB and the Director of Education Williams-Taylor for the fulsome support to aid the process.

In response to a query regarding the extent of recognized languages to be taught to school-aged children, Mr. Mitchell confirmed the coming release of a draft document which expands on the number of Indigenous languages to be taught in Ontario schools, including Inuktitut and Algonquin.

4. Update from the District

Deferred

5. Update from the Community

Deferred

6. Closing

Mr. Dumont offered a closing at 8:38 p.m.

Following the meeting, District Administration decided that the audio recording of the meeting would not be shared with anyone outside the meeting, as these discussions take place within a safe space for everyone to express their thoughts and opinions and the integrity of the space must be upheld.