

Nancy Dean
Parent
School Council Chair

Dear Parent Involvement Committee

Thank you for hearing me today,

I wanted to acknowledge all the effort that has been put into our return to school and thank everyone for their hard work. I understand the large amount of information and choices that have needed to be made to get us here.

Over the past couple of weeks the incredible feats that have been accomplished by staff that are unfortunately undermined due to communications challenges. We have experienced "system glitches", delays, what appears to be ill timed changes, course cancellations and replacements, misunderstanding and last minute information which does not reach those who it has to reach. Parents and School Councils are turning to each other to find out what has been communicated to them and to try to make sense of it all.

I am here to ask for improvements to the communication strategy that PIC and OCDSB is currently using to communicate to parents and school councils. I do appreciate that everyone is doing their best given the circumstances and resources, yet it's not as effective as can be. I would like to better understand as well as assist in improving these vehicles and strategies.

Question:

1. What are OCDSB and PIC strategies to ensure parent engagement and effective parent consultation. Specifically am looking at timely communications to parents and to school councils and ways in which parents and councils can give feedback, ask questions and provide suggestions that work for them. How are you structuring things to ensure that communication is a 2-way - Not only push out but also a welcome in.
2. With regards to information for parents:
 - a. A huge barrier to engagement is not knowing where and how to find out information and ask questions. Can there be clear outline as to the communication lines that are suggested for parent to use.
 - b. Feeling that parents are on their own, when many parents are experiencing same thing. Often being asked to go to Principal or teacher for their "unique" situation and then finding out that it's not that unique. Can we look at how to better manage this.
 - c. Information needs be communicated in timely manner and accessible on board website as soon as it sent out. What is your timeline for posting on website?
 - d. Can schools use their website to post information and specific information in easy to understand manner? Please use this tool more effectively. We know schools are working to address family needs for accessibility to tech and this can also include using tech to improve communication with parents.
3. With regards to School Councils.
 - a. How effective is the communication to school councils?
 - a. How many schools have an active council?
 - b. How it is ensured that councils are getting information they need? The School Council Newsletter just sent out Friday 5:30 pm that tells us about PIC discussing supports to councils - why did they not get invite? No time to even know this was happening let alone get feedback from councils about what they need/want.
 - c. Can communications regarding Councils be send directly to School Council Executives and Principals? Can this be main protocol?
 - b. Support to School Councils
 - a. Policy states - 3.2 The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board shall ensure the establishment and effective operation of school councils in every school within its jurisdiction. Parent/school associations may continue to co-exist along with the school council.
 1. What/who are the OCDSB staff responsible for the overseeing of the effective operation of school councils? How are they communicating in a 2-way fashion?
 2. Has there ever been an evaluation of this?

Communications is ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL in making this work. We cannot be in this together if we do not improve our communication with each other. The needs of communications have to be addressed and supported.

This is only the tip of iceberg I know, communications is multifaceted. I look forward to using our communications resources as best as possible.

Please let me know what I can expect from this and what next steps are? These are very high level things I have asked for and it was very difficult to come to put this all into one letter. As a paren, council chair and community member have so many more questions.

Thank you for your time and your efforts,