

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

September 17,
2020
6:00 pm
Zoom Meeting

Members: Albert Dumont, Monique Manatch, Inini McHugh,
Benny Michaud

Staff and Guests: Wendy Hough (Trustee), Lynn Scott (Trustee), Donna Blackburn (Trustee), Justine Bell (Trustee), Dorothy Baker (Superintendent of Instruction), Carolyn Tanner (Human Rights and Equity Advisor), Jody Alexander (Vice-Principal, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education), Joy Lui (Student Trustee), Charles Chen (Student Trustee), Chantel Verner (Indigenous Education Itinerant Teacher), Kareen Butler (Indigenous Education Itinerant Teacher), Kris Meawasige (Indigenous Student Support and Re-engagement Coordinator), Kyl Morrison (Indigenous Graduation Coach), Nina Stanton, Lili Miller, Anthony Debassige, Leigh Fenton (Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Opening

Elder Albert Dumont opened the meeting.

Mr. Meawasige requested that the meeting begin with introductions from the participants, as was done in circle when the meetings were held in the lodge at Gloucester High School.

2. Community Discussion

Superintendent Baker shared that, on a suggestion from Mr. McHugh, she is inquiring over the prospect of assembling smudge kits or other appropriate gift items to offer the First Nations, Métis or Inuit participants on the IEAC council. This will help the council to begin the meetings from home and join in the ceremony together. Mr. McHugh mentioned that in a virtual meeting, the council does not have the opportunity to come together in a circle and perform a smudging ceremony. The concern was that people may be low on a supply of medicines or new members joining may not have access to a smudging kit. Ms. Miller supported the idea as it reminded her of balanced reciprocity.

Vice-Principal Alexander encouraged the idea of the replenishing of medicines and requested that Elder Dumont discuss the protocols of the circle to share the knowledge with the new participants. Elder Dumont stated that whenever something is done for the benefit of everyone, good will come of it. In the Algonquin Nation, smudging is performed for centering, healing and to restore balance. He uses medicines that serve to cleanse negative energy from the room and in turn people become calm and able to speak without fear in the meeting. There is a trust and faith placed on sacred medicines and ceremonies. A ceremony takes place when the sage, sweet grass, cedar or tobacco is lit. By partaking in the ceremony of smudging, one does not renounce their own spiritual beliefs but rather it is an opportunity to be grateful to be human and be able to smell, taste and hear.

2.1 Return to School Questions from the Circle

Superintendent Baker reported that students have returned to school. The District has created six new virtual schools, referred to as Ottawa Carleton Virtual (OVC) schools. She acknowledged staff members who worked hard to organize and reorganize classes, along with the custodial staff who have been getting the schools ready following Ottawa Public Health guidelines. To date, the return into the school routine has been smooth for staff and students. The transportation challenges are under review. In her visits to the schools she has seen the smiles behind the face masks.

Vice-Principal Alexander reported that she is coordinating with her team to ensure that students are receiving support. She is working to support teachers who are aiming to infuse Indigenous education into their curriculum. Teachers in the new virtual schools have connected with her for advice on content.

Indigenous Education Itinerant Teacher Butler mentioned that an online Google community has been established to share curated Indigenous resources. There is a push to move away from textbooks and find alternative, enriching ways to present Indigenous history and perspectives. She has arranged “Tea and Talks” to discuss Orange Shirt Day in a respectful way.

Indigenous Student Support and Re-engagement Coordinator Meawasige reported on his work with the Indigenous Education team on the NAC20 online summer course. This was a grade 10 History credit course specifically for First Nations, Inuit and Métis students who were entering grade 9 and also included grade 10-12 students, who were interested in the unique learning opportunity, to support the new entrants with earning credits. He and the team continue to support students from the 2019-2020 school year. Some did not register for either the in person or virtual education model in time to meet the deadline. They have been engaged with principals to provide students and families with information to alleviate some of the anxiety around the reopening of schools. Additionally, he has been preparing to host the first Original Voices Youth Council meeting, beginning next week. This meeting will celebrate the Youth

Council students who graduated in June 2020 and will provide an opportunity for new students in grades 9 to 12 to participate. He concluded by noting the work that he and Indigenous Student Support Coordinator Josh Lewis have begun on implementing virtual sharing circles for high school students every Thursday.

Instructional Coach Verner spoke about her commitment to supporting the English courses offered for Indigenous Studies in grade 11, which are referred to as the NBE. A large part of her focus is to help teachers convey the new content to their students in a culturally respectful way, while being mindful that there may be Indigenous students in the classroom. She interacts with literacy coaches to better support these NBE teachers as well. Additionally, she announced that the Indigenous Speaker Series began last spring with the Learn at Home program. Due to its success, this series will continue virtually into the 2020-2021 school year. Of note is that these presentations by Indigenous people are not only directed to students who are enrolled in the NBE program but all students across the District are invited to attend.

Graduation Coach Morrison reported that his work is to assist Indigenous students enrolled at Gloucester High School. The reengagement rate of students this year was evident. Some students are returning to school after not attending for upwards of two years. A new class for the 2020-2021 school year was created: a lodge cohort. There are sixteen students in this cohort. Some are completing credit recovery; others are engaged in interdisciplinary studies like Math or English. A Long Term Occasional (LTO) teacher is assigned to this cohort. They support these students in responsive ways as they adjust their engagement in class and online due to the fluctuations in comfort around COVID-19 risk.

Silatunig Inuit Student Support Services Leader McHugh proclaimed that by working continuously to support the mental well-being of students, he feels a sense of rejuvenation now that school is in session. A child and youth mental health counsellor, an art therapist and a youth substance use and wellness counsellor were hired recently to serve the Mental Wellness division. As a community partner, his organization welcomes student referrals from the school boards. He highlighted that through the determination of Trustee Hough, who wrote letters of support for the creation of the educational hubs for online learners, they were able to submit a Child First Initiative (CFI) grant application. They are in the process of creating two hubs, two days a week for both elementary and secondary students. In thirty days they should receive news on the status of the application.

Trustee Scott requested additional information on the Grade 11 NBE course and the relationship between learning about Indigenous voices and teaching culture in schools. Instructional Coach Verner responded that in these courses it is the Indigenous authors who are to be the voice of the teachings. Should the class wish to learn about beading, for example, the teacher would need to invite an

Indigenous person to teach students First Nation beadwork. Elder Dumont commented that engaging the Indigenous community members in the teachings is mutually beneficial.

3. **Update on the Indigenous, Human Rights and Equity Roadmap**

Superintendent Baker advised that she is not the keeper of the IEAC agenda and the council can set the agenda for items they would like to discuss.

Mr. McHugh suggested that all requests that have been raised in previous meetings should be subject to follow-through. He recognized the courage one shows when they bring an idea to the circle. He used the example that last year former Inuit Council Member Ragilee Alourt had requested that the lighting of the Qulliq in schools be made possible. Coordinator Fenton agreed to work with Mr. McHugh on a tracking mechanism for items such as these. For a future meeting he would like to obtain an approximate estimation on the number of Indigenous online learners. Superintendent Baker noted that every OCV school will have a web page featuring information on Indigenous Education. She is working with the Indigenous Education Team to put together an email introduction about everyone who works to directly support these students. Determining a definitive number of Indigenous students who have chosen the online learning model would be a challenge because some students have not self-identified as Indigenous, at this time.

Mr. McHugh expressed his interest in learning more about the increased funding directed at Indigenous learning and the funds specific to Indigenous students and mental health. Superintendent Baker plans to invite Finance Manager Kevin Gardner to present to the IEAC in October.

Superintendent Baker stated that there is specific reference to policies around cultural practice in the Indigenous, Human Rights and Equity Roadmap (The Roadmap). The Qulliq lighting ceremony could be included in these protocols. Vice-Principal Alexander is currently writing a smudging protocol. Ms. Michaud offered to share Carleton University's policies regarding use of traditional medicines on campus. Ms. Michaud noted that for the First Nations and Métis and Inuit students who would like to smudge, it is a right that is protected under the Indigenous Spiritual Practices Protection in the Ontario Human Rights Code. Ms. Miller requested a timeline for completion of the District's policy. Superintendent Baker responded that the smudging document is slated for completion in 2021. Human Rights and Equity Advisor Tanner indicated her interest in collaborating with Ms. Michaud and Vice-Principal Alexander to institutionalize this policy to ensure that the same types of benefits and protections are extended across the District.

Superintendent Baker provided an update on The Roadmap and shared that the original draft was edited with comments from IEAC. The Roadmap is a measurable document, aligned with the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan, with explicit

timelines and milestone markers. A scorecard is being developed which will provide accountability for the District. Vice-Principal Alexander contributed that the document speaks to the shift that they are trying to achieve within the District. The final version will be shared with IEAC via email. She and Vice-Principal Alexander would be grateful to receive any further feedback before it appears before the Committee of the Whole on 13 October.

4. Reports

4.1 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Baker announced that the Chair of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), Sonia Nadon Campbell has requested to attend IEAC as an observer. Trustee Blackburn explained that the advisory committee meetings are public meetings and all are welcome to attend as guests. Superintendent Baker concurred that all people are welcome.

4.2 25 June 2020 IEAC Report

Moved by Albert Dumont

THAT the Indigenous Education Advisory Council Report dated 25 June 2020 be received.

Carried

Under business arising from the minutes, Elder Dumont expressed the view that students should be encouraged to feel goodwill towards police officers. Circles can be a place where a student and an officer hold space and begin to know one another. He volunteered to attend such an arrangement.

Trustee Scott noted that the motion to ask staff to develop a plan for a review of police involvement in OCDSB schools, and specifically School Resource Officers, was approved at Committee of the Whole 15 September 2020, and will go to the Board meeting on 22 September 2020 for a final decision. This motion asks for a plan to be developed, including consultation to capture many voices. The next step will be to approve the plan and a review will begin afterwards. Superintendent Baker reminded the council that the meetings are public and the link to join the meeting is on the District's website on the calendar event page. Trustee Bell commented that she believes it is important that the District approach the review from a "do no harm" principle in order to avoid exposing people to additional risks or mental strife through the action of a review.

5. Information and Invitation

5.1 Indigenous Education Advisory Council Meeting Schedule 2020-2021

The 2020-2021 IEAC Meeting schedule was distributed as a part of the meeting package for informational purposes.

6. Closing

Mr. Dumont offered a closing at 7:48 p.m.