

PARENT INVOLVEMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, March 31, 2021

6:00 pm

Zoom Meeting

Members: Diana Mills, Martyn Reid (OCASC Member), Malaka Hendela (OCASC Member), Seyi Okuribido-Malcolm, Abdulnaser Atef, Kristina Price, Annette Dillon, Jacquie Samuels, Jennifer Hood

Non-Voting Members: Brett Reynolds (Associate Director), Wendy Hough (Trustee), Justine Bell (Trustee), Alain Brule (Principal, Cedarview Middle School), Sarah Pope (Principal, Castlefrank Elementary School), Ian Morris (SEAC)

Staff and Guests: Michele Giroux (Executive Officer, Corporate Services), Lynn Scott (Trustee), Donna Blackburn (Trustee), Diane Pernari-Hergert (Manager of Communications & Information Services), Engy Abdel Masieh (Policy Analyst), Nicole Guthrie (Manager of Board Services), Emily Addison (OCASC Rep.), Nancy Solange Dean (AAC), Darren Gatley (Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Call to Order

Chair Reid called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

2. Approval of Agenda

Moved by Diana Mills, seconded by Annette Dillon,

THAT the agenda be approved

Carried

3. Delegations

3.a Sarah Young RE, Concerns with Secondary School Model for the 2021-2022 School Year

Ms. Young noted that she is a parent of two children of Glebe Collegiate and raised concerns about the secondary quadmester model. She noted that her daughter was required to learn the full grade 9 math curriculum in 9 weeks, and the quadmester model could result in a gap of 1.5 years between grade 9 and 10 math classes. She added that teachers have had to amend parts of the curriculum in order to maintain the reduced course timelines which does not allow students to feel that they retained the

material or are prepared for the next grade. She also noted that her son, who is in grade 12 and planning to attend post-secondary school, was on track for scholarships and is now experiencing some challenges as a result of the quadmester model, placing potential scholarships at risk. She expressed concern about student mental health and her daughter's general lack of engagement which may be a risk to the successful completion of her grade 9 year.

Chair Reid noted that three parents had provided similar concerns and requested that Ms. Young delegate on their behalf.

In response to queries from members, the following clarifications were made:

- Ms. Dillon expressed her support to have children back in school full time, but also recognized the complexity of the Board's planning for full-time return for students. She queried what role parents could play to support the Board with the return plan;
- Ms. Young noted that teachers have been providing support to her children, including resource teachers who reach out on a daily basis and guidance counselors who have been providing academic planning; however, Ms. Young noted that she has not received any information regarding mental health supports available within the District;
- Associate Director Reynolds noted that districts across the province are using an adaptive model in response to Ministry guidelines which outline safety measures for COVID-19. Significant changes are not expected for September 2021 as cases are increasing. At the first prudent opportunity, the District plans to gradually resume in-person class models. Mental health training for staff has increased and additional resource workers have been deployed to schools to provide support and resources, where possible. Parents should reach out to their school for information;
- Ms. Young expressed the view that students need structure for the entire school day; and
- Chair Reid noted that parents feel they are not receiving sufficient information on the District plans for the return to school in September 2021 and would welcome additional information to better understand the rationale for some decisions.

4. Discussion Items

4.a Barriers to Engagement

Executive Officer Giroux noted that understanding the research on parent involvement is useful in identifying the opportunities and gaps in current

practices which can help identify areas of focus for the work of the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC).

Executive Officer Giroux presented an overview regarding barriers to engagement for parent involvement and provided a collection of resources and key elements of the research as outlined in the Barriers to Engagement Memorandum.

Executive Officer Giroux also shared a video outlining Karen Mapp's Dual Capacity- Building Framework which explains the importance of building and enhancing the capacity of staff/families in the following areas:

- Capabilities – Human capital, skills and knowledge, including cultural competency;
- Connections – Important relationship and networks built on trust and respect;
- Cognition – Assumptions, beliefs, values, and worldview; and
- Confidence – Individual sense of comfort and self-efficacy

Executive Officer Giroux highlighted that Karen Mapp's framework research looks at transitioning from individual initiatives and can be connected to the District and PIC work plans through the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan and the Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Roadmap. She noted that at the school level, this could include a school improvement plan to achieve parent engagement goals. She added that barriers within school communities vary greatly.

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

- Ms. Hendela expressed the view that the research appears to be more oriented for operating a school board and is disconnected from parents. Instead, she suggested the use of individual lived experiences as guidance for the discussion;
- Ms. Dillon pointed out that any action PIC undertakes needs to be sustained by resources, and queried how is this concept of parent involvement would work with insufficient resources;
- Ms. Mills noted that there have been updates to the research documents that were provided to the members and highlighted the importance of collaboration with teachers, students, parents and the community.
- Ms. Mills questioned how to get individuals involved in the initiatives that focus on building the intellectual, social, and human capital of stakeholders engaged in education, and what real life experiences

students would learn from this. She added that students would benefit from understanding real world applications for the material they are learning. She suggested that education can be made more enjoyable and insightful by involving members of the community who can mentor and provide access to materials and other educational opportunities;

- Ms. Hood pointed out that a focus on building an early positive relationship between parents and schools could augment and increase parental engagement. She noted that this would further support parents of children with special education needs entering the school system for the first time. She added that this idea will not only improve the experiences of parents who are struggling in their first interactions with school, it could also increase capacity for the classroom teacher and remove some of the challenges that can occur in the early years. She suggested that PIC members brainstorm ways to identify and address issues between parents and schools;
- Ms. Price noted that in working with the Ottawa Network for Education (ONFE) , she seeks to have volunteers in the classrooms to assist with programming. She noted that many of the volunteers that support programs could employ better methods of engaging interested parents. She suggested that parents could also be engaged by bringing topics home for discussion to foster parental engagement;
- Ms. Samuels drew attention to the OCDSB Remote Learning Ottawa Carleton Virtual (OCV) Public Group. She noted that this group of parents have students in the virtual classroom and actively participate in their daily school activities. This group provides resources for parents in how to better support their children in the classroom, access extra supports, and has a list of pooled resources; and
- She highlighted the many benefits of this collaborative community-based approach.

4.b PIC Work Plan

During the discussion and in response to questions regarding the draft PIC work plan, the following points were noted:

- Ms. Hood suggested the introduction of an onboarding strategy for parents as a way to address expectations. A process that assists parents in navigating the school system would provide a clearer understanding in an effort to address their concerns with teachers and schools, which would help to build early positive relationships. This standardized process could also be applied for parents in understanding the Ontario education system, any special education needs concerns, language barriers, or any other matters to make the “path” easier for families;

- A survey could be used to gather information from families on their experiences in entering the education system;
- Mr. Atef expressed concern that Ottawa Public Health (OPH) and the Ministry have great control over the school system and that the District should have its own say in the matter of closing schools. He noted that closing schools has implications and issues for families;
- Ms. Mills informed members that they can bring forward items to be addressed for inclusion on the agenda. She added that in discussions with Director Williams-Taylor, she indicated the lack of PIC representation on Committee of the Whole (COW) and hoped to see PIC representation in the future;
- Ms. Dillon submitted that, based on her experience, parents of primary and middle-school children are more engaged than those with students in secondary schools. She suggested that the work plan include elements to engage secondary school parents;
- Ms. Hendela noted that parents engage for either fear, fun, or frustration and that a user-centred approach is required to identify specific community needs. An ambassador program could be implemented to engage parents when a matter arises. She added that PIC could focus on specific audiences, needs, and community building pieces to fill gaps. She drew attention to the lack of communication between PIC and other statutory committees with parent members, and that opening communication with them would allow PIC to connect with other parent communities which could be a work plan goal;
- Ms. Hendela noted that parents also engage in personal advocacy through trustees, teachers, school community, superintendents or delegations which can be a barrier as the process can be intimidating to many in the Ottawa community. She suggested that communication through social media or other means could create awareness for families to know that PIC is available for support and engagement;
- Chair Reid suggested the addition of a work plan item entitled “parental guidance into the school system”. He explained that this would focus on kindergarten to grade 1 and the transition from grades 7 to 9 would allow for families to understand what engagements are available. Parents could also be approached to ask about their experiences and what processes could be improved to ensure an easier introduction and transition into the education system;
- The importance of parental involvement and navigating pathways for secondary schools will be included in the work plan;

- Exit interviews with parents could be conducted before the school year ends to gain insight on any engagement needs and how their needs changed before and during the pandemic through a community-centred approach. The input could be gathered by PIC members, community members, school councils, trustees, principals, and other individuals to ensure a breadth of engagement and feedback;
- Chair Reid suggested that PIC members discuss ideas on how to ease parents into the education system at the 12 May 2021 PIC meeting. He suggested data could be collected from parents who are exiting the system to obtain their observations. These could then be reviewed and the recommendations provided to staff;
- Ms. Hood noted that data collection may have fluctuations due to the pandemic;
- The pandemic has provided a learning opportunity for parental engagement. For example, conducting school council meetings using Zoom allows families to easily join meetings without having to make arrangements or overcome other barriers to appear in person;
- Ms. Hood suggested that a parent-to-parent website that is associated with the District could help remove barriers for parental engagement. She added that the proposed website could be more welcoming as it would not feel as “corporate” with intimidating acronyms and would be more user friendly for families;
- Not all families may be aware of the parent portal and PIC could use other non-traditional means of engagement through the various popular social media platforms, such as Twitter or Facebook, to create awareness and direct families to information and engagement opportunities;
- Members pointed out the importance of a place for more meaningful discussions and engagement. Engaging with a variety of families in soccer fields, places of worship, at the store, community events, parks, and other locations promote inclusivity, discussion, and helps remove barriers;
- Trustee Hough noted that her primary engagement mechanism is being present in the schools. She added that zone meetings and virtual community meetings are effective methods to open channels of communications and allows for easier participation for different families and communities;
- Trustee Bell noted that Carleton University communication and journalism students approached her to study how to effectively outreach to parents and communities. The study indicated that a

regular newsletter supports engagement. She added that she maintains a social media presence, regularly writes a segment for the local newspaper, and that wearing OCDSB senate clothing can engage community members in public. She suggested that whichever method of engagement is used, to first reach out Executive Officer Giroux as there may be certain rules or guidelines for engagement;

- PIC members agreed that they should be more publicly engaged;
- In response to a query regarding the available supports that PIC could use to promote engagement, Executive Officer Giroux noted that there is a PIC page on the OCDSB website that could be expanded upon, and that the District has active accounts on a variety of social media platforms. She noted that to build the presence of PIC, it is important to determine the purpose and approach to build awareness as an advisory committee to the Board. She suggested that PIC develop messaging for incorporation into existing platforms. PIC meetings are public and there are opportunities for additional reach through virtual meetings;
- Personal social media accounts do not allow for sustainability as these accounts cannot be passed to future members. It may be more effective to have a centralized approach;
- PIC members may consider having their photograph posted on the PIC portion of the OCDSB website so that they can be more easily identified to members of the public;
- A mechanism such as an email for parents to reach directly out to PIC could be considered;
- Ms. Hood suggested that a sub-committee be formed to discuss a strategy and messaging for public PIC communications. She suggested that a degree of separation from the District take place so that PIC communications can operate freely;
- Executive Officer Giroux noted that if a sub-committee is formed, it will be important to clarify and establish a mandate. She added that the mandate of the sub-committee should be in the context of PIC's role to advise the Board on parent engagement strategies and to have consistent messaging;
- Ms. Hendela noted that the role of the PIC is more than advisory. PIC's full role is outlined under section 28 of *O. Reg. 612/00*.

Moved by Martyn Reid, seconded by Jacquie Samuels,

THAT a sub-committee for PIC public communication be formed, headed by Jennifer Hood.

Carried

- Executive Officer Giroux noted that there is limited time to complete initiatives before the 12 May 2021 PIC meeting. She noted that the Board is limited in its resources and capacity; however, this discussion has provided feedback for staff to enhance their own practices and communication to PIC. She added that parental engagement in formal settings, social media, emails, and meetings are good engagement strategies for those interested in that engagement. She pointed out that another important element of parental engagement is to support families at home, parents with children with special education needs, and those that cannot attend meetings but need support in finding resources to build capacity to understand how to address their concerns;
- Chair Reid noted that the discussion on parental onboarding and establishing the sub-committee for a communication strategy for parental engagement will continue at the 12 May 2021 PIC meeting. He suggested that the May meeting be used to capture PIC members' experiences and community feedback to make parent introduction into the education system successful;
- Chair Reid noted that discussion on the Parents Reaching Out (PRO) grant could occur in September 2021 to allow adequate planning time for staff; and
- Ms. Hendela noted that she sits as the Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils (OCASC) representative for COW Budget, and that the budget process has not been shared with PIC. She suggested that the committee may benefit from an explanation at the 12 May 2021 meeting on funding for PIC as it does not resonate with the parent community and could enable members to provide input to the budget process regarding engagement funds.

Moved by Malaka Hendela, seconded by Diana Mills,

THAT a presentation from staff to explain the budget process for PIC be presented at the 12 May 2021 PIC meeting.

Carried

5. Review of PIC Report, 13 January 2021

Moved by Diana Mills, seconded Jacquie Samuels,

THAT the Parent involvement Committee report, dated 13 January 2021, be approved.

Ms. Mills noted that information regarding her experience is missing on page 7 and she will provide the information to be included to board services.

Moved by Diana Mills, seconded Jacquie Samuels,

THAT the Parent involvement Committee report, dated 13 January 2021, be approved, as amended.

Carried

6. Information Items

6.a Chair's Report

Provided for information.

6.b Director's Report

Provided for information.

6.c OCASC Report

Ms. Hendela suggested that communication between PIC and OCASC could be improved. She encouraged PIC members to attend OCASC meetings and to review their minutes. She added that PIC and OCASC concerns could be raised at each other's meetings.

Executive Officer Giroux noted that there is a defined liaison role from the OCASC representative between PIC and OCASC as the founding of PIC recognized the importance of OCASC as a partner in parental engagement in the community.

Ms. Hendela expressed the view that OCASC will continue the liaison between organizations; however, the previous OCASC reporting mechanism as a standing item was not effective.

6.d PIC Correspondence

The PIC correspondence registry was provided for information.

7. New Business

Ms. Hendela noted that the use of the chat function in Zoom can only be seen by panelists and use of the chat should be re-considered.

In response to a concern from Ms. Hendela, Chair Reid noted that delegations could be asked more effective questions or suggest motions to advance delegations concerns.

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:32 p.m.

Martyn Reid, Chair, Parent
Involvement Committee