

Upper Grand District School Board

Parent Involvement Committee

May Minutes (May 27, 2013)

In Attendance:

Parents: Martha MacNeil, Kathy Watts, Deb Drake, Heather Janes, Jane Brown, Jan Pettigrew, Giselle Scanlon

Board Personnel: Martha Rogers, Brent McDonald, Linda Busuttil, Ann Charles

Guest Speakers: Linda Benallick, Caroline Mitchell

Regrets: Kay Elford, Heather Bailey, Scott Doern, Axy Leighl, Sarah Bolton-Blair, Jaspreet Dhillon

Welcome and Introductions

- Welcome extended to all and introductions were made.
- Approval of May agenda. Technical difficulties in producing March minutes. No minutes to approve at this time. Will try to generate at a later date from compiled notes.

Chair's Report

- People for Education's report on schools came out today – see their website
- Kathy and Martha M. attended the PIC Symposium (Ministry of Education) in Toronto, April 19th & 20th, 2013. Felt it was a fantastic venue – lots of networking opportunities and building of connections with other PICs, Catholic and other school boards, in particular Peel and York. Multiple sessions were offered:
 - ABC's of Mental Health – a very straight forward website offering Parent and Teacher resources. Session included a walkthrough of the website and a checklist to go through to identify concerns. <http://www.hincksdellcrest.org/ABC/org>
 - Ministry of Education's Stepping Stones Program – a new program, produced in collaboration with many high profile individuals (including Dr. Jean Clinton, Dr. Debra Pepler, Dr. Stuart Shanker) set to launch in September to help educate educators on how to have good relationships with struggling youth and view them more positively. The primary focus is on high school students but can be used for younger kids. It was suggested that we might try to get a guest speaker in the future to talk to PIC about this program. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/brochure/stepStones.html>
 - TVO Website – Discussion focusing on the Homework Help section of the website. Parents can also access the independent learning courses (ILC) through this site. Representatives also indicated they would be willing to do information sessions at schools for a nominal fee (transportation costs only). <https://homeworkhelp.ilc.org/>
- A few resources were distributed including York Region's PIC brochure, sample of Peel DSB's High School Parent Handbook.

Board/Ministry Report

1. Full Day Kindergarten Presentation: Guest Speakers Linda Benallick and Caroline Mitchell

- Superintendent of Education Linda Benallick and Elementary Curriculum Leader Caroline Mitchell presented a PowerPoint display of an overview of the implementation of Full Day Kindergarten in our Board. The guest speakers focused on the regular day program.

- The 3 other members of the FDK planning team at the Board are: Denise Knapp (focus - extended day program), Gail McKeen and Ruth Maclean (Early Learning Program officers: focus - helping with in-servicing and support for principals and teachers).
- The core components of the regular day program are: Vision of FDK; Play based learning; Educator team; Classroom environment. The program document being followed is the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program (draft). <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/kindergarten>
- 42 schools in the Board will have FDK in September. The remaining 22 will have FDK implemented in year 5 (2014).

Caroline Mitchell

- Reviewed the “Play-based learning” concept which is a classroom rich in child-initiated play with focused learning through teacher and early childhood education direction in the areas of self regulation and the inquiry approach.
- The FDK program has a whole child focus and is:
 - Play based
 - Child centred – choices for students
 - Integrated – students can see interactions between social, emotional, physical; the environment is the ‘third’ teacher
 - Promotes physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of children
- Curriculum areas that are emphasized are:
 - Self-regulation and personal and social development
 - Learning together – the role of the educator is as a facilitator and co-learner
 - Learning through inquiry - project based or short experiments
 - Learning in authentic ways - embedding learning in real life contexts; promotes integration of all subject areas
 - Promoting integration of Literacy and Numeracy throughout the day
 - Planning is based on the interest of children
 - Discovery learning – more time is spent outdoors
 - Creating a purposeful learning environment – children are included in designing the classroom environment i.e., centres, labeling items, help set up the class and displays, etc.
 - Making the learning visible – Board is focusing on using technology in the classroom to create displays, record ideas, documenting students showing what they are actually learning.

Linda Benallick

- Reviewed the Vision of FDK, the Educator team and the Classroom environment.
 - Educator Team: The classroom teacher and the ECE work in collaboration with each other. They work cooperatively to plan and deliver the program together, share knowledge and expertise and prepare the classroom for the day.
 - Methods of Co-instructing: There are various ways this can be done including 1 educator teaching while the other assists; each teach ½ the class at the same time; one works with a small group while the other interacts with the remaining students; one works with a small group while the other teaches the rest of the class; or each can teach a small group while the other students work in interactive centres.
 - Communicating with Parents: This is a shared responsibility and can include phone calls, conferences, newsletters, website updates, etc. However, for PT interviews this may be different – teachers are salaried and evening interviews are included in their duties, ECEs are hourly waged so evening interviews would be on a volunteer basis.
 - Classroom Management: Educators share equally in the responsibility and together build consistency, build relationships with children and support self regulation. Educators maintain a ‘hands-off’ policy (different than in child care centres) and coach students rather than assist in areas such as toileting and dressing.

- Assessment: The teacher and the ECE both gather assessment data and discuss collaboratively throughout the school year, however, the teacher does the formal assessments (evaluation and report cards).
- Classroom sizes are larger with FDK (23 – 26) than current mandated class size (20) but note that no ECE is required if there are less than 16 students in the class. There can only be one class in the school where that is the case.
- Early research into the impact of FDK is showing promising results: a decreased level of risk for children and an increase in school readiness.
- The Board offered a training session “Reaching In – Reaching Out” to help support teachers in assisting students with self regulation.
- Areas of challenge:
 - Board is struggling to obtain the needed # of ECEs (104) for the fall.
 - Impacting FI schools – there is no French training being offered to ECEs currently and, to date, the Ministry is not working on any initiatives to increase ECEs with French. The Board may look at offering this locally rather than wait for the Ministry to address.
- Focus groups have been held in some schools where FDK has already been implemented to get parental input on how things are working. Some parents indicated that they felt less wanted as a volunteer in the class, but this may change as everyone settles in to the new system.

2. Director’s Report

- Draft budget will be presented to the Trustees. The budget is balanced. The Board will try to ‘buy ahead’ as a cushion against budget constraints in the next couple of years, particularly with respect to year 5 of the FDK implementation and technology refresh.
- There will be no decrease in EAs, ECEs will be increasing and no cuts in Speech and Language therapists. There will be no decrease in textbook funding.
- The Board will ‘over spend’ in Special Education and ‘under spend’ in Board administration, Principals and Vice-Principals.
- Individual schools are being encouraged not to carry over a large amount in their budgets.
- It is possible that ETFO will have an MoA soon, the secondary agreement is being worked on.

Focus Group/Spring Event Review

- Approximately 10 schools ran the focus groups and results have come back from 6.
- We have met the requirements for the purpose of the PRO grant and the report can be prepared.
- PIC would like to have a much wider collection of information so in the fall will encourage those who have done the training to run groups in their schools and provide results to PIC. Once information is collected, we would like to compile results in a document to be distributed to all schools.
- Suggestion was made to bring together those who ran the groups and get feedback on what worked well, what didn’t, alternatives to gathering the information that would work better for their school communities, etc. Perhaps over the summer so results would be available for the fall.
- Some schools found the information they gathered was helpful to them on a school level which was a bonus, since our premise was to gather information to be used on a more wide spread (PIC) basis.
- Next step – follow up with those that attended the training sessions to ensure effort is being made to schedule focus groups.
- Very positive feedback on the Spring event held April 25th at College Heights with guest speakers Annie Kidder and Jacqui Strachan (People for Education).
- The dinner was excellent and the student servers are to be commended on their professionalism and level of service.
- People for Education have taken on several attendees as interns for the summer.

- Attendees from high school councils did indicate there were far fewer networking opportunities for them – the event was attended mostly by elementary schools. This would be a goal to work towards for next year's event.
- Similar to last year, comments were made on the difficulties interacting with others at the tables when rectangular tables are used. Due to high attendance, it did feel a bit crowded at the tables as well, since many had an extra 2-4 chairs added.

Communications

- Feedback from schools is indicating that the campaigner program has been a successful way to distribute information. Very few schools/councils appear to be using or accessing First Class. It was suggested that PIC look into having their own campaigner account. This would provide access to all interested parents rather than just School Council Chairs and Principals and might help with some of the difficulties noted with respect to passage of information.
- Village Tool Box and Google Docs are being used as well, as an online support piece to assist school communities with discussions and sharing of information.
- Board is looking at exploring communication options available and having a plan in place for the fall.

Budget Items

- Current balance in the PIC account is \$8,507.52. These funds can be carried over into the next year.
- \$3,727.28 remaining grant funds from the PIC Regional Grant (used to fund the Focus Groups and the Spring Event) can't be carried over and must be spent this school year. Suggestion was made to print copies of some of the resources from the Parent Tool Kit developed by the Ministry. One copy was distributed to each school last spring and it is a great resource. It may be more cost effective to order one full package for each school from the Ministry if that is a possibility. Brent will follow up.

Open Discussion

1. Grants

- Some schools have had little success with grants this year, while others have been quite successful.
- Grant applications are becoming more complex, time consuming and the reporting requirements becoming more stringent. On-line applications are sometimes problematic as well, particularly where high speed internet is not available.
- There is often no feedback from granting agencies on why a particular proposal was unsuccessful.
- Suggestion to look at applying for United Way support, however, this might not be available for schools.
- Strategies that may be helpful:
 - Don't limit focus to those grant opportunities that are for schools in particular, but research other granting agencies such as non-profits and private foundations.
 - Provide letters of support from community sources if appropriate

2. Seminar

- Taylor Evans P.S., Friday May 31, 7 p.m., Guest Speaker: Debra Pepler, registration required.

Next Meeting

- September 2013: Date, time and location to be announced.