

Upper Grand District School Board

Parent Involvement Committee

September Minutes (September 24, 2012)

In Attendance:

Parents: Giselle Scanlon (out-going chair), Axy Leighl, Martha MacNeil, Jaspreet Dhillon, Heather Janes, Kathy Watts, Maureen Oesch, Deb Drake, Manizha Wodud, Carrie Proudfoot, Sue Shaw, Krista Thompson, Sara Untch, Rhonda Sharpe, Scott Doern

Board Personnel: Martha Rogers (Director of Education), Brent McDonald (Superintendent of Education), Ann Charles (Elementary School Principal), Marty Fairbairn (School Trustee)

Regrets: Kay Elford, Heather Anderson, Heather Bailey (Community Representative)

Welcome and Introductions/Approval of Agenda and Minutes

- Welcome extended to all and introductions were made.
- Wide representation of schools from across the board and from both elementary and secondary schools including: Victoria Cross, Victory, Waverly Drive, King George, Edward Johnson, Taylor Evans, Centennial CVI, John F. Ross, John McCrae, Ken Danby, Rockwood Centennial.
- Minutes of previous meeting were emailed to attendees, and are available on request.

Mandate and Overview of the Parent Involvement Committee

The mandate is to:

- Work with School Councils to advise and provide support, especially with respect to identifying and addressing barriers to parent involvement/engagement.
- To receive/solicit information from School Councils and to channel that information back to the board.
- To provide advice to the Board on specific topics when requested.
- The goal is to provide two-way communication and feedback. It works well in this board.
- Maximum # of parent members is 12. (In order to ensure diversity and representation from all regions of the board, up to 3 supplemental appointments can be made by consensus). 1 or 2 year commitment.

Budget

- Starting budget is ~ \$10,000. This amount is based on a dollar amount per student.
- Some of these funds will go towards a reprint of the PIC brochure.
- In addition, PRO grant funds were applied for and granted this year. Amount of just under \$20,000.

Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grant

- Parent Involvement Committees are able to submit PRO grants similar to those done by School Councils and the UGDSB PIC applied for, and was successful in obtaining, a \$19,750 grant for this year.
- This was a 2 part application with the goal of building parent involvement within schools and includes: 1) A spring event with a guest speaker similar to the event held last year, 2) Build capacity of parents in communities and schools and provide PIC with useful information through the use of parent focus groups.
- *Focus Group Component*
 - This will be designed to provide PIC, school board and individual schools with information on where the needs lie in terms of parent engagement/involvement.
 - We can't pay someone to run the focus groups under terms of the grant, but we can hire someone to train a group of individuals who would then provide training to a larger group that would ultimately run the focus groups within their own schools/councils. Currently have 2 quotes and require a third.
 - Would need a core group forming a sub-committee to organize and coordinate this aspect and who would receive the initial training (November). The following have volunteered: Axy, Kathy,

Manizha, Giselle, Carrie, Maureen. The Dufferin Coalition for Kids (DuCK) have some experience running focus groups and would be willing to share their knowledge and suggestions.

- This group would then provide training to a second group (January) designated to go into the schools and provide guidance in running the focus groups within the school. Consider the use of social media for recruitment of parent focus group trainees.
- *Spring Event-Speaker*
 - Information and feedback obtained from the in-school focus groups would then be evaluated and used to determine the appropriate speaker.
 - Goal is a speaker who would facilitate strategy development rather than provide a lecture type format.
 - Must bring in a Canadian speaker.
- Proposed budget would be ~\$10,000 each for facilitator training and for the spring event (covering speaker fees, food, promotion, etc.).
- Suggestion: based on last year's event, round tables are recommended rather than square to better facilitate communication between participants. Keep in mind when booking a venue.

Parent Engagement Information

1. Ministry Parent Engagement Information

- The Ministry has provided a new package "Building Parent Engagement" which includes toolkits for parents/councils. One was sent to each school however, most in attendance indicated that their School Council had not received it. Superintendent to contact all schools to see which ones have received it and to ensure each School Council gets a copy.
- This is also available on the Ministry website, but it was indicated that some areas, particularly rural communities, have difficulty accessing on-line resources due to a lack of adequate internet service.

2. Parent Involvement Committee Brochure

- A reprint of the brochure will be done and would like to try to get the PIC brochure posted on each school's website. Schools will be informed of these options and offered printed brochures in addition to the website up to a maximum number per school – the number of kindergarten and new students in the school.
- Important to ask school communities their preference in terms of electronic and/or printed copies but it was felt that limiting brochures to new parents and kindergarten families was not ideal. Website access would improve accessibility for families with older children, and each school would be sent 20 copies to be made available in the office or on the School Council board.
- Cost of printing the brochure is about \$1.25 each with a minimum of 2,000 ordered.
- The brochure has been translated into several languages. Part of PIC's mandate is to ensure those who face barriers to engagement feel welcomed and included and translated materials contribute to that.
- Perhaps SEAC information should be included with PIC information to help additionally with those barriers. It was recommended that this information be available on the website under Parent Resources.

3. Parent Involvement Committee Website

- School councils would benefit from information on how council is run, by-laws, roles of members, etc. and it was suggested that the website be fine-tuned to make this easier. It was noted that this information is all available on the PIC website, however, there is a significant amount of information there and it can be cumbersome at times. It was proposed that a one page summary be compiled containing links to the various information to allow quicker access to areas of interest. In most cases this could be done by the board webmaster except for those schools which have their own, non-board managed website. The summary would need to be provided by PIC members.

4. Other

- Peel board has a colourful parent involvement folder available that we may be able to access at cost. Campaigner program-\$10/month fee for emailed parent involvement information.
- Suggestion was made to provide schools with information about the PIC meetings and parent involvement information in their newsletters with their next council meeting notices.

Superintendent's Report

- PRO Grants - 35 School Councils in the board were successful in applying for PRO grants. This is an increase over last year. It isn't known at this time how many schools applied.
- \$500 is available to each School Council as a school based funding grant for use on parent involvement activities. It was indicated that many councils are unaware of these funds. A reminder will be sent out to councils and to principals that this funding is available for council use.
- Suggestion was made to send a reminder encouraging council chairs to use the first class account as a means of staying informed. PIC communications are regularly posted in this forum.
- These issues could also be brought forward at the Family of Schools meetings.

New Executive Positions

- Co-chairs: Axy Leighl and Martha MacNeil
- Treasurer: Heather Janes Excel program to be provided by Martha MacNeil
- Secretary: Kay Elford and Krista Thompson will share the position.
- Members for 2012/13: Krista, Carrie, Sue, Manizha, Maureen, Kathy, Heather J., Martha M., Jaspreet, Ronda, Scott, Axy, Giselle, Heather B.

Meeting Dates

- The number of meetings can be flexible but must be a minimum of 4.
- Held the 4th Monday of the month. Proposed October 22, November 26th, tentative January meeting, March 25th (final planning for the spring event), May 27th (evaluation of the spring event).
- The suggestion was made to rotate some meetings to Fergus to accommodate those farther out (possibly January) and draw in those interested from more Northern schools.

Communications

- A sub-committee will be set up with a goal of increasing outreach to schools to ensure they understand PIC can be used as a resource.
- Would include keeping the website current and updating the existing material. Some of the links, particularly in the fundraising section, need work. Potentially include information on grant writing and workshops being offered that parents might be interested in.
- Volunteers for this committee: Martha MacNeil, Kathy Watts

Board and Ministry Update

1. Bill 115

- Martha Rogers gave a very succinct summary of the process by which negotiations typically occur between local school boards and bargaining units, the events leading up to the implementation of Bill 115, and some of the results and implications of this process for our schools, board and teaching staff.
- Currently the legality of the implementation of Bill 115 is being challenged in the courts i.e. does this contravene existing labour law.
- The hope is that school boards and English public unions (ETFO, OSSTF) will be able to continue negotiations and to maintain good relationships.
- At the elementary level, there have been some "pauses" by individuals from their voluntary duties (such as extracurricular activities). Elementary unions are not currently in a strike position so these withdrawals are voluntary. There are significant differences in how this looks at individual schools within the board and ranges from no withdrawal from voluntary activities in some schools to a more school wide approach in others.
- At the secondary level, these voluntary withdrawals have not occurred to date, but could if/when a legal strike position exists.
- In light of this, it might be wise to schedule large school events (i.e., Family Fun Nights) for later in the school year.
- There have been no student walk-outs in our board over this issue, but have been in some surrounding boards.

- Concern expressed by some with respect to the Grade 8 trips. It was suggested that purchasing cancellation insurance might be prudent.
- Questions were raised as to any recourse parents might have to express their concerns. They could contact representatives of the government or of the unions. There is no benefit in contacting the board on this issue.

2. School Board Amalgamation Discussions

- School board revenues, including professional development revenue will be lost over the next 2 years. Cutbacks in declining enrollment funds will also be occurring.
- Approximately \$17 million is being taken out of the budget of school boards.
- If boards, on reflecting on their revenues and expenditures can't accommodate for this in their budgets (i.e., through expenditure cuts), they are encouraged to explore amalgamation partnerships with other boards.
- Currently the Wellington/Bruce/Huron-Perth Catholic school boards are discussing a merger as a result.
- Amalgamation of boards, particularly over a wide geographic area, could have some potential difficulties in terms of plant operations and might require satellite facilities.
- There will be a process of consultations in the future which may include trustees and Parent Involvement Committees. If PIC is invited, it would be beneficial to consider participating.

Next Meeting

- Monday October 22nd, 2012 at 7:00 p.m. at the Board Office (Victoria Road).

Minutes prepared by D. Drake