

# Meeting Minutes of Virtual Blossom Park School Council Meeting Wednesday May 19, 2021 at 5pm

## 1. In attendance

- Susan Fattal: Chair
- Naoko Nakamura: Secretary/Treasurer
- Nabi Habibi: Parent Member
- Caroline Theriault: The Principal
- Colin Halsall: The Vice-Principal
- Carmelina Falcucci: New Vice-Principal for next school year
- Andi Kinnear: Student
- Two other parents

## 2. Welcome, Approval of Agenda and Last Meeting's Minutes

Susan welcomed everyone at the beginning of the meeting, and added an agenda item to include our special guest Carmelina Falcucci, who will be our new Vice-Principal for the school year 2021-2022. Carmelina will have the time to introduce herself and tell us about her background.

Agenda was approved by everyone and seconded by Naoko.

Minutes were approved by everyone and seconded by Nabi.

## 3. Chair's Update

- Family Science Night:
  - 50 families have signed up. After the registration closed, the remaining 10 spots were offered to Sawmill Creek elementary School. They were interested and happy to participate in this event; their speaker night which they organized had no registration among their families.
  - A reminder email with the information and session links was sent to registered parents on Monday. Another reminder will be sent on the day of the event.
  - Vice-principal reminded students of the registration in the morning assembly every morning.
  - Families are still picking up the kits until tomorrow at 3:00 PM. 13 kits are still left to pick up. Christina (office administrator) will contact families.

- Susan attended a Zoom OCDSB meeting with the principal and vice-principal regarding the outdoor learning space project. The information will be shared later in the meeting.

#### **4. Treasurer's Update**

The current balance is: \$4,117.42

Interest credit \$1.02 was added to the balance.

\$170.17 is to be paid for library books purchase this month. Librarian Mrs. Natyshak originally informed us the total amount for the requested library books purchase was \$206, but it turned out to be a lot cheaper, thanks to the sale.

#### **5. Principal's Update**

A few changes at school:

- There are 4 new students attending the special education program. The students are so happy to be back in the in-person learning. Two staff members are working in the class.
- Email regarding the change of option for the next school year was sent out to families. Parents could change their selected option to either in-person or virtual learning.
- Significant changes were seen during Ramadan. Many students had difficulties with attending school. We saw an increase of attendance this week.
- Many families are having a hard time having children attend school while they work full-time at home.
- Some families have been completely disconnected. Social workers, principal, and vice principal have tried to connect with those families to see how students are doing and to get them engaged.
- Special Education students need identification placement review, and the meeting will be held in the next few weeks.
- Vice-Principal Mr. Halsall is leaving school for Vimy Ridge Elementary School.
- We are in the middle of the process of looking at staffing for the next school year.
- Next year: 380 students and 19 classes in total. 340 students are to be in-person learning. 40 students will attend virtually.
- The System Leaders Meeting was held this afternoon.
- Different process for distributing report cards in June. Parents will be informed of this when it gets closer.

Question from Susan: A lot of families seem to be disconnected. How are they disconnected?

Answer from Principal: There must have been some barriers because their children were not attending school. Children 6-12 years old have to attend school by law. School could not get a hold of them by call and was concerned about those children. School cannot provide them with technologies such as Chromebooks and hot spots, which means that they cannot get the way of their education. School is always looking for opportunities to support them.

Question from Susan: Could language be the problem? Has there been attempts to communicate to them in Arabic?

Answer from Principal: We had a group of a multicultural liaison, social workers, principal, and vice principal who all helped. We successfully got one family engaged. Principal even paid a visit to one family at their home.

### **Vice Principal's Update**

- Engagement is the key for virtual learning.
- Science Night is great for virtual learning. Families came to pick up the kits and they were all well-prepared for the pickup.
- Echo System presentation and a drumming presentation are happening soon.
- Grade 8's leaving ceremony will be held in a very similar way as last year's. We will pre-record it and post it on the school's website so that families will be able to access in an asynchronous way. It will be announced in the next council meeting.
- Mr. Halsall talked about de-streaming. He was a guidance counselor at Blossom Park before. In Grade 8, students are asked to choose their educational pathway for the next four years and beyond.

There were some significant barriers for them to choose between the applied or academic course. It is very difficult to switch once you have chosen your pathway. School board has taken a look at the data that is related to students with learning disabilities and other exceptionalities. It seems that students from racialized communities, low-income households and other marginalized groups are more likely to be steered away from academic courses.

Many schools are doing the piloting program. Many students who got in the applied course did well, and those students who chose the academic course have been maintaining their high level of achievement as well. In high school subjects, English is the most important subject and math comes the second.

Principal: We have consulted some families in Grade 8 regarding their selections. 5 families who had chosen the applied course chose to switch to the academic course.

Susan: Some of my daughter's classmates had no idea what the applied was about. It seemed to them like just an easier course. I hope that this will be an opportunity for Grade 8 students to decide on their future path. It might be a good idea to give them an example class of both courses. The decision to de-stream is significant and more families need to be informed about that.

Principal: We will look for opportunities to engage students and families earlier on in the next school year.

## **6. Students Update - by Andi**

- Appreciate Vice Principal Mr. Halsall for giving him the opportunity to lead the daily Body Break (the whole school virtual workout session) during the virtual learning period for the past month.
- A lot of classmates seem to be bored in virtual learning and find it draining their energy. In-person learning is preferred.

## **7. Special Guest:**

Carmelina Falcucci (new Vice Principal for next school year):

- Leaving the department of learning support services to join Blossom Park. Used to be a homeroom teacher at Blossom Park.
- Supported 20 schools in her current position.
- Have two twin daughters and came from a family of immigrant parents. Born and raised in Ottawa and have lived in Vincent Massey and Hillcrest area.

Susan: Any advice from Vice Principal Mr. Halsall to new Vice Principal Ms. Falcucci?

Mr. Halsall: Hope to pace herself better than me. I was on the move all the time.

There are still some students who remember her, and she will love working at Blossom Park.

Susan: Ms. Falcucci will be welcome to join our next council meeting. We are a small active council and always encourage feedback and suggestions from families and staff.

## **8. Matters for Discussion**

- Science Night:
  - There are slots for 60 families. Two sessions in each hour: 6-7pm and 7-8pm.
  - Each group has been given a name: A1 and A2: 6-7pm, B1 and B2: 7:30-8:30pm

- Scientists in School suggested that a School council member would be present in each one of the sessions, and either the Principal or Vice Principal would have the option to be there to welcome the families and introduce the sessions at the beginning.
- A1- Susan and Principal to attend, A2- Naoko to attend, and B1- Vice Principal and Susan to attend. In B2 session, most families (10 families) are from Sawmill Creek school; Kelly Smith, Sawmill Council chair has signed up her family and will be there. Tim Pearson, Sawmill Creek Principal will introduce the session.
- Email with detailed information in English and Arabic and a link was sent out to families on Monday. Would it be a good idea to resend the link to each group on the day of the event? – Principal and Vice-Principal agreed.
- The platform used for the Science Night is Microsoft Teams. It can be accessed either using Microsoft Team's app or Chrome or Edge web browsers. Safari browser does not support it. It might be a good idea to announce that in the school's morning message.
- All kits have been repackaged with name tags. We still have 12-13 kits to be picked up at school, and Administrator Christina will remind those families. - Susan and Principal could also help drop off the kits at families' houses.
- Nabi asked whether there is another way to get the kits, as he can't pick them up from school during the assigned time.

Susan will contact him after the meeting to arrange for his family's kit pick-up. She has dropped off another kit at a parent's work place; some parents are at work from 9 am-3 pm, and we are willing to help them get their kits.

- Outdoor learning space:
  - Had a Zoom meeting with OCDSB to learn how they plan to proceed with this project.
  - There are 5 layouts to choose from. They can organize and take care of project management once schools have the money ready.
  - Contractors: They have standing agreements with them in terms of purchase orders. Two contractors: high-pricing and lower-pricing. However, they said that there is not much difference in between.
  - We could customize and tailor the models to our use such as adding or reducing logs. We can also modify the shape depending on the location that we choose.

- The average cost for such a project is \$52,475 - \$55,650. For example, picnic tables are \$2,620 each (including installation), a blackboard with special outdoor features is \$1,575, and a stage is \$3,875.
- If a school ordered now, the installation could be done over the summer. 15 - 42 days lead time to source materials.

Susan: appreciate the OCDSB's effort to help with managing and organizing such a project, but disappointed as the options discussed don't seem to match the challenges of our COVID time. The reason for the urgent need to set up an outdoor classroom is to get the students and teachers to utilize the outdoor space more efficiently for education purposes during the pandemic.

We need to find a more affordable practical option. For example, some schools in the US were offered \$5,000 each to set up an outdoor classroom, and they did a lot with that budget. e.g. logs, simple blackboard and storage.

Nabi: Want it to be somewhere in the middle.

Naoko: It is quite a bit of an amount to make it come true. It would take 5-10 years to collect the money. Will we be using the outdoor classroom in the future? Is it worth aiming as a goal rather than looking for short-term goals?

Susan: Believes that it is still a good idea to put the money aside for this future project. There is a movement to get kids outside now. Outdoor learning has a lot of potential and can get the kids more motivated.

OCDSB may be able to support some schools financially towards this project depending on whether they have offered any financial support for outdoor projects to the school before.

We will have to depend on fundraising in addition to seeking grants and donations.

Nabi: Can OCDSB ask for support from the government for similar projects in their annual budget? We could contact MP and try to pressure the government.

Principal: Currently there is no money to support all schools. We could certainly talk with our trustee on the school board who is the representative of our government at the local level and see what opportunities they could support as the government.

The models offered in the OCDSB meeting seem to be based on old models of education spaces. We can utilize our current outdoor resources and courtyard assets. Many teachers are doing gardening projects in our courtyard. It is an approach of outdoor education and scientific learning. We have some physical space to loop in low cost items such as chalkboard paint. We have a few areas where we could potentially paint walls. It would be easier than trying to raise \$50,000. So, we could focus on small projects in the meantime to suit our needs.

Susan: procurement and installation has to be done through the Board. It is still not very clear if we can purchase and use certain smaller items. Safety is key.

Principal: We can do that item by item and case by case. We could also reach out to one of the project managers who was present at the meeting and loop him in and ask him to explain how this might work for our school.

Susan: We will look at this in a more creative way and we will try to be flexible to make the best out of what we already have. It is not a bad idea, though, to start working towards saving money for the major project, whether it is the seating area or the shades. We will eventually get something done.

Nabi: It seems we are all on the same page. However, we need to make an effort to push the government to help us out.

After the COVID, what are the policies of using the school facilities?

Principal: The interior part of the school is a community space. The yard is also a community space up to 10pm.

The meeting was adjourned at about 6:10p.m.