

Blossom Park School Council
Meeting Minutes – January 19, 2022

In Attendance:

Susan Fattal: Chair

Ayan Haji Egeh: Secretary

Nabi Habibi: Treasurer

Caroline Theriault: Principal

Carmelina Falcucci: Vice Principal

Tammy Draper: Teacher Representative

Seynab Hersi, Zeina Hosny, Masa Alfarawati, and Sedra Alrajab: Student Representatives

1. Welcome and Approval of Agenda and Minutes:

- Susan welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- The agenda and minutes from the last meeting were approved.
- There was an adjustment to the minutes. There was a staff member, who came back from maternity leave. Susan will update the minutes accordingly and re-upload the minutes to the school council webpage.

2. Chair's Update

- Susan and Nabi completed the TD bank paperwork for the co-signing authority.
- OCDSB paid the liability insurance for the School Council members to cover the period from November 1, 2021, to November 1, 2022. The insurance is intended to protect the School Council executive members and volunteers acting on behalf of the School Council in the event of injuries or damage to properties.
- The Board is in the process of providing a \$500 annual grant to School Councils for parent engagement activities for the 2021-2022 school year. We still have the \$500 grant amount from last year in our account.
- Note that all OCDSB schools, in-person or virtual schools, will be receiving the grants this year.
- Susan has received news about the PRO Grant as well. She mentioned that two years ago, schools were allowed to apply for the grant individually; back then, our school sent a proposal and received a PRO Grant of \$900, which we spent on books for the school library that are related to identity and culture.

- PRO Grant, which stands for Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grant, is designed to support parents through engagement activities in their community and supporting students' achievement and well-being.
- Susan indicated that the PRO Grant application process has changed. Boards now get the grant money and manage it as needed.
- Last year PRO Grant was spent on OCDSB Speaker Series to offer information sessions to the parent community and provide parents and educators with access to leading ideas in education that will better support student learning and well-being. Our Council decided to pick the Family Science Night run by Scientists in School. Fifty families from the school joined the science night activity. Families from Sawmill Creek Elementary School received the extra ten spots. The event was a success.
- Some Council members from other schools have expressed their dissatisfaction with the Speaker Series sessions and requested from the Board to do something different this year. There were some issues in the organization of the nights and the interest of parents in the topics selected.
- This year, the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) has been granted \$78,000, and it is seeking feedback and ideas from school councils on parent engagement activities.

Three of the options they need feedback on are:

- To allocate each school council a fixed amount of money for an activity they choose.
 - To spend the money on activities related to training provided to school council members on their virtual presence: web pages, virtual meetings and social media.
 - To spend the money on communication materials, community art project, parent engagement booklet, and language translation.
- Lessons learned from previous years in our council showed that parents are more interested in activities that engage their children.
 - Carmelina suggested that the lack of engagement could be due to the lack of technology in some parents' households.
 - Carmelina will present the three options to Caroline for her feedback.
 - Susan clarified that the suggested options are only for feedback purposes; the Board will ultimately decide and approve what activity should be delivered.
 - Tammy asked for clarification about the option regarding community involvement. Susan said the community art project is probably an activity that may engage the students as well as the parents.
 - Susan noted that the main issues with the Speaker Series are technology and language barriers for many of our parents. We did try to research live translation services for

Zoom, but it was costly. In addition, it required a special Zoom account platform that needed to be provided by the Board.

3. Treasurer's Update

- Nabi will try to get the limited access card activated next week.
- The school usually receives our paper bank statements. Treasurer has received one banking statement so far from the school. Carmelina will take note of that and will send Nabi the statements when the school receives them.
- The total balance remained the same at \$4048.56.
- Susan mentioned that we still have \$200 allocated to the outdoor school project (in addition to the \$8,000 from school), and the \$500 grant from last year.

4. Principal's Update

Caroline, the school principal, couldn't join the meeting.

5. Vice Principal's update

- Carmelina provided the updates in consultation with Caroline.
- **Staffing updates:** the office administrator, Mrs. Christina Gluch, moved to a new school. Sara El Zayed is the new office administrator. Lujein Dayoub is the office administrator assistant, replacing Kimberley Ribble, who is currently on leave.
- Katie Young, the grade 1 teacher, is back from maternity leave.
- The school hired Amy De Carufel as the new education assistant working with the behavior intervention program.
- The school has been collecting the technology from the students. They have been disinfected and an inventory has been taken.
- The school librarian will begin to code devices into the school system. This can be very useful in the event of moving to virtual learning again. This way, the librarian would have quick access to the status of the devices in that inventory process.
- The school is taking on the COVID-19 Protocols. As per the Ministry of Education directive, the school will not track any COVID-19 cases, or do contact tracing.
- N95 masks were provided to all school staff. Reusable three-layer cloth masks have been provided to all students. We are waiting for the rapid antigen tests for staff and students and are expected to provide two kits. We are still waiting for the kits to arrive to school.
- Unfortunately, we are not moving forward with any extracurricular activities. The district decided to put hold on any extra activity or group work. There is a very strict protocol to maintain distancing with students and staff.
- Furthermore, the school had to dismantle the Kiss and Ride pick-up area because of the maintenance of the area; it is city property and not the school property. The Kiss and Ride has been relocated to the front of the school.

- Kindergarten information night is on January 26. Caroline and Carmelina will be discussing the kindergarten program with the parents virtually.

6. Teacher's Update

- Tammy will send an email to teachers for any concerns and items to discuss with the school council.
- Today is the first day back to school for some kids.
- The biggest concern from teachers is students' not keeping the masks on and some masks not fitting properly. It is a continuous challenge. It is an issue school-wide.

7. Student Representatives

- Carmelina asked what needed to happen to the appreciation board, how to dismantle it, and how the students and parents' council want to proceed.
- Zeina suggested to remove the sticky posts.
- Susan left it up to the school administration to decide when to dismantle the board. If there is any material that could be reused, we could keep it.
- Sedra asked whether they still can take photos for the grade 8 yearbook.

Carmelina mentioned that group work should not be happening for now, as social distancing is in place. Currently, the development of the yearbook is put on hold.

- Carmelina mentioned that the yearbook idea sounds optimistic moving forward. We have six months left of the year, and we still have some time to come back and reconnect. The best approach at the moment is to take a pause to maintain the safety of the students.
- Susan suggested to have students collaborate online to create the yearbook, if possible, sharing ideas and school experiences. The yearbook does not have to be only about pictures.
- Carmelina mentioned that the photo retake day has been dismantled, since the school is not able to have external party to come to the building.

Important matters for discussion:

1. Return to In-Person Learning: Challenges, Expectations and Ways to Support:

- Ayan expressed her concern going back to school with the Omicron cases on the rise.
- Nabi mentioned that students are happy to go to school and see their friends and teachers.
- Nabi said that the road condition and weather condition is challenging to some families.

- Sedra asked if going to virtual learning is still an option. Carmelina mentioned that this applies only to students with health condition. There is a new process in place.

The process starts with a request sent to principal and consulted with the superintendent for approval. The process is still in place but a decision is made and echoed back to the family, who have requested the transfer.

- Sedra also inquired about the bus cancellation issue. Carmelina mentioned that the Ottawa Student Transportation Authorities (OSTA) for the district is having a problem with driver shortage, and as a result there is cancellation of routes. The purple bus route was one of the buses that have been cancelled. Parents are encouraged to check the OSTA website for any bus cancellations on a daily basis.
- Carmelina said that we are not the only school who is going through this challenge with the bus cancellations. Other schools are affected as well.
- Susan is concerned about a number of issues, such as;
 - the air quality in the classrooms,
 - the quality of the new masks provided to students,
 - taking off masks during lunchtime
 - some parents not wearing masks during pick-up time
 - the students' vaccination rate
 - the lack of COVID-19 tracking
 - Parents' cooperation in relation to kids' screening
- In relation to the internal air quality, Susan asked if the HEPA filters that the Board talked about have arrived to school and how many we already have. Carmelina doesn't have an exact number yet, and if needed the school will receive more.
- Susan mentioned that in order for the filters to be effective, there should be one filter installed properly in each class.
- The price per unit, provided by the Board, is estimated around \$830. Susan checked online and found a smaller unit for \$200 to \$250 per unit, which is more affordable in case we wanted to get some.
- Susan mentioned that in the online OCDSB COW meeting, a doctor suggested having CO2 detectors in the classrooms to provide an indication when the level of CO2 level increases. Teachers then can open the windows for ventilation when there is a need. Susan suggested reminding the teachers to open the windows to bring more fresh air into the classrooms more frequently, especially during lunch time.
- In relation to masks, staff have the N95, which is a high-quality mask. However, Susan thinks that the masks provided to students are not as protective against OMICRON. We need to think about how we can provide better quality masks to students.

- Susan contacted two suppliers for KN95 masks, asking about the possibility of mask donation to our school or reduced prices for a bulk order. They haven't come back to her yet.
- Even though those masks are disposable, but with good care they can last and be reused from 5 to 10 days.
- Canadamasq is a good supplier of good quality masks. Susan reached out to them to check the possibility for reduced prices.
- Members are encouraged to share mask supplier possibilities with the school.
- Zeina mentioned that on the bus many kids take off their masks and change their seats to sit closer to each other, which increases risk of transmission.
- Carmelina has been voicing her concerns about the mask wearing on the daily announcement. Unfortunately, there is no staff on the bus to monitor the students, and the driver is busy focused on the road. Carmelina will reinforce mask wearing on the bus in the morning announcement.
- Susan thinks there is an equity issue with who gets good quality masks. The Board is promoting the idea of having parents to supply additional masks to their children including the masks provided by the school board. Susan is concerned that some low-income families might not be able to provide quality masks to their children, which raises a concern regarding equity. Susan wants to write an email to the OCDSB or the trustee about her concern and to provide more support to the low-income families that are not able to afford high quality and more fitting masks to their children.
- Carmelina provides full box of masks to bus drivers to provide to students who forget to bring their masks. The school has been supplying each bus driver with masks for the students.
- Susan mentioned that the surgical masks are not a good option. She is not sure whether double masking is sustainable. Susan will follow up with the supplier to donate quality masks to the students since the Omicron variant is on the rise.
- Sedra wanted to know what needs to happen to the transition of grade 8 to high school related to different school board.
- Carmelina encouraged Sedra to speak and discuss it with Ms. Jehan.
- Susan noticed that some parents were not wearing masks at pick-up time. Susan suggested to provide extra masks to staff on duty to hand in masks to parents who are not wearing masks and who are interacting with staff closely to reduce risk of the COVID infection spreading.
- Regarding the vaccination rate, Susan asked if we could post posters around the school and the main door to send the message to parents and their children to get vaccinated.
- Carmelina mentioned that Public Health has many posters and videos on their website that can be shared with the parents. Carmelina would discuss with Caroline regarding the posters.

- Susan offered to work on a simple poster to encourage vaccination and dispel false information about vaccination.
- Susan also inquired about the possibility of asking to have a mass vaccination clinic for the kids in our area.
- Carmelina mentioned that the school is not designated as a vaccination site, and it's a discrete decision.

2. Tree planting project:

- Carmelina sent the yard map to Susan. The deadline to apply for the Tree Grant is June 1st.
- The School Council would need to decide on the location, water source in the area, equipment storage, access and utilities, tree species and size.
- Susan provided some background information to Ms. Draper about the tree planting project. More information can be found on December 15th minutes.
- Carmelina wants the members to move forward with the tree planting initiative and create working groups. Carmelina will share the map with the members to decide on the location of the trees.
- Susan suggested taking the students' input regarding the tree planting area.
- Carmelina will consult with the staff and students regarding tree species and planting sites.
- Tammy asked about the total number of trees that could be planted at the school. Susan mentioned that the City of Ottawa has a list of trees they offer to plant. Susan will contact the city to get more information regarding their list of tree species and the number of trees that can be planted.
- Tammy indicated that so many curriculum aspects could be linked to this tree planting initiative.

3. Library Book Return and Donation Initiative:

- Background information of last discussion about school library can be found in the December 15th minutes.
- Carmelina would like to discuss the type of books that need to be ordered, the grade level, and the reading level. Carmelina suggested addressing this in the March meeting.
- Tammy mentioned that since the school is not sending any books home, there is no urgency to move forward with the communication materials to the parents.
- Tammy had a question about the outdoor education space that we want to construct.
- Susan gave Tammy a brief idea about our communication with the Board in this regard, and mentioned that we are moving forward with the project slowly due to the lack of

funding. The Board estimated the class to cost a minimum of \$50,000 and the shading to cost a minimum of \$100,000. The estimated cost is too much for us. We will try to see a more affordable and practical option.

- Carmelina clarified that the funding for the tree initiative doesn't include the outdoor class project.
- Tammy asked if there is a working group of staff and parents for the outdoor class project to research what other schools, provinces or countries have done to learn from.
- Carmelina clarified that we could form a working group to move forward once the grant is approved.
- Susan mentioned that she has learnt that some schools in the US have been able to set up an outdoor class for \$5000.
- Susan encouraged the council members to provide ideas for next meeting.
- Susan reminded everyone to share the donation link with families and friends who might be interested in donating to the School Council. It is both on the school's website and the school Council's webpage.

8. Questions/Concerns/Suggestions

9. **Next meeting** is scheduled for Wednesday, February 16th, 2022, at 5:00 pm.

10. The meeting was adjourned at 6:25 pm.