

Inner City Advisory Committee Minutes
Thursday, May 08, 2014
6:00 pm to 8:00 pm
Parkdale Jr & Sr School
78 Seaforth Av, Toronto

In Attendance	Ingrid Palmer, Jennifer Arp, Carina Bleuer, David Clandfield, Jaye Evans, Nathan Gilbert, Laurie Green, Jann Houston, Lesley Johnston, George Martell, Aim Mujib, Cheryl Skovronek.
Regrets	Trustee Sheila Cary-Meagher, Trustee Howard Kaplan, Helen Fisher, Alejandra Bravo, Michael Kerr, Bonnie McDonald, Nancy Vogel,.
Staff	Vicky Branco, Simona Emiliani, Lise Medde, Vidya Shah, Hilary Wollis, Reta Favrod, Cindy Zwicker-Reston.
Guests	Kiwot Abraha, Hawa Ali, Fos Ashkir, Tsering Choedon, Dolma Esering, Carrie Hantash, Abdelmoaty Hewida, Melissa James, Mayooraan Kamalanathan, Nina Marrelli, Liloutie Kaloo Sookoo, Tsering Tsomott, Dr. Heather Yang, Muazzama Younussi.

Welcome, Introductions, Information Sharing and Announcements
ICAC Co-Chairs

- Community co-chair Ingrid Palmer welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- Palmer thanked everyone for showing their commitment to inner city communities by attending this evening.
- Palmer thanked Parkdale Jr and Sr School for hosting the meeting.
- Introductions were made around the room. Regrets for the meeting were read.
- Announcements:
 - Lesley Johnston announced the free book launch evening for [Re-stacking the Deck](#) on May 15th. Flyers are available.
 - Lesley Johnston announced the free screening event for "Crisis of Distrust: Police and Community in Toronto, at Social Planning Toronto on June 5th 2014. A flyer is available.

1. Approval of Agenda
ICAC Co-Chairs

- Approval of the Agenda was moved by Jennifer Arp. Seconded, George Martell. Approved.

2. Welcome from Parkdale School

- Principal Susan Yun welcomed everyone to the school and thanked the group for attending.
 - Parkdale is a wonderful place to grow children. This evening, some of our wonderful children and parents will be speaking to you.
 - We have a team approach at the school. It is easier to support our children when we have the needed resources in place, and when we work together.
 - At Parkdale, we use an integrated approach to support children, including many partnerships in the school. You heard our string quartet in the school lobby, who are learning with a program from Sistema Toronto. In

addition, Chapters Indigo has given \$200,000 in books to the school, which is \$50,000 more than the annual school budget.

- The Model Schools for Inner Cities program allows us to access a wide range of resources so that everything is in place to help students learn and grow at Parkdale.
- I would like to introduce our four students. They are representatives of our junior and senior student councils.
 - **David:** I am in grade four. Every day, all Parkdale students receive healthy snacks, and through Blessings in a Backpack many students take home a backpack of food for the weekend.
 - **Simara:** I am in grade 5. All of the classes in our school go to the Science Centre for free each year. This year, my class got to see the light and sound show. We learn something new each visit. Learning is fun at the Science Centre and it is good to learn from a real scientist.
 - **Druth:** I am in grade eight. Programs like Scientist in the Schools, and technology like ipads, smart boards, and laptops help us learn. I am on the tech team, and I see how technology helps kids. I think that the technology makes learning more fun and keeps students interested.
 - **Arni:** I am in grade eight. Each year we have hearing and vision checks, and kids receive free eye glasses if they need them. When my friend couldn't see the teacher's work, I had to stop listening to the teacher and explain to my classmate who couldn't see. Now that they have glasses, they are doing better in school and everyone can focus on learning.
- When there are gaps in learning, it is easier to close the gaps when we get to know our community. We do this in different ways: with School Council meetings, meetings for newcomers that include translators and settlement workers. On Wednesdays, our librarian and CSW meet with parents. We have informal fireside chats. We provide parents with opportunities to talk to us about what is important to them in the school curriculum.
 - Books written by students are published and included in the library collection. These books reflect the experiences of the children in their lives. Sample books were shared with the group.
 - Many local experts come into the school to work with our children. You passed an example in the hallway. An architect visited with students, and they discussed how an architect would solve the parking lot issues at the West Lodge buildings. The discussion was tied into science class, using a topic relevant in their lives. The wonderful models created out of that visit are on display.
 - Another example of student work is on display here in the library. Students created submissions for the Roberta Bondar photography challenge, bringing together their experiences and curriculum.
- Another way we connect with our community is with Community Walks. As a Model School, parents are our partners. On a walk, parents take school staff to places in their neighbourhood that are important to them. I am going to share a short video of one of this year's walks, where we visited the Toronto Public Library, the Masaryk-Cowan community centre, the Parkdale Food Bank, and the West Lodge apartment buildings.
 - As staff, we knew that 250 students live in the West Lodge buildings. We experienced the morning rush as 250 kids come down the elevators for school at same time. That helped our staff understand why large numbers of students might be late, especially if an elevator is out of service. Parents shared their experiences of a good community, where parents help each other, and they have friends in the building.
 - We learned that living in Parkdale works for families because there are many community services available nearby, a playground, a community garden, the community centre, and access to transit.

3. Presentation: Vaughan Road Academy

- Principal Zwicker-Reston introduced Vaughan Rd Academy, in the St. Clair and Bathurst area. It offers three programs, the International Baccalaureate, elite sports and arts, and the local secondary program. The school offers many opportunities for students through things like field trips, and strong athletics.
- Two grade nine students are with us today to speak about their experiences.
 - What is your favourite thing about the transition to high school:
 - Student one: meeting new people, and having more extra help from teachers than at my last school, and small classes.
 - Student two: We get more help because of small classes, and there are lots of sports. In the fall, the grade 9 and 10 girls meet to talk about selves, and topics like self-esteem.
 - What is your favourite subject, and what do you think makes a good teacher?
 - Student one: My favourite subjects are math and English. A great teacher is someone who is understanding and fun, and knows how to work with you, and is patient with teens.
 - Student two: My favourite subjects are math, English and gym. I think that a good teacher is helpful, goes at your pace, and is fun.
 - We are prepping for the grade 9 EQAO test with our teacher. We work on some EQAO questions each week, and we have a smart board in the room that we can work with, which makes it easier, and it is helpful to keep from getting bored.
 - PYF summer program: I didn't want to go at first, but I did enjoy it and I got to meet a lot of new people. We went to Centre Island and to a career fair. I did get a high school credit, and a certificate. I would recommend it.
 - My advice to a grade 8 students so that they can be successful: you should do your best, and don't get distracted. Ask for help if you need it.

4. Presentation: Cluster C4 Parent Academy Committee

Sprucecourt PS:

- I will be talking about communication today.
- Like many, I was introduced to CPAC right away at my school. CPAC is about staff who are warm and engaging, and who welcome parents with a very positive attitude.
- The Positive wheel shows qualities that help an individual feel safe and secure in a group, making it a positive experience. I think that one thing CPAC does well is active listening.
- Qualities that are important in staff communication to parents are strong interpersonal skills, an extremely welcoming attitude, and being good role models.
- It is important that CPAC helps parents to navigate the overwhelming information provided by TDSB. The TDSB web site is intimidating, especially for non English speaking parents. One of the things our CPAC did was have a Principal attend and go over all of the special education language with us, so parents understand are comfortable with it and can support their kids.
- Social media: In Canada, 80% of the population is online. This includes families in inner city communities who have mobile devices. We haven't done enough to engage parents online and with social media. When a CPAC wants to do this, there are too many restrictions placed on us from TDSB. CPAC parents need easier access to social media to allow us to engage.
- An example is the student Agenda – can CPACs communicate through the agenda by having their own information added to it, to enhance parent engagement and the parent experience?

Parkdale PS

- I will be talking about the International Languages program, its importance and its sustainability.
- I am speaking from my first-hand experience of my daughter attending classes.

- My daughter and her friends go to Tibetan language class. Her friends go to other language classes (Tamil, other)
- Culture is linked to language: when you teach language you preserve culture.
- There are some issues with the program, and definitely there is room for improvement.
- In my impression, the standard is low. The whole year my daughter is learning the alphabet. But the class is just once a week, and the class contains children with a wide range of ages and language ability.
- In my opinion, \$70 is not enough budget for resources for an entire year.
- We receive a report card, but I think a parent-teacher interview would be a meaningful progress report on what our child is learning. Currently, the program does not allow time for instructors to meet with parents.
- Parent-teacher interviews would allow everyone to understand the long term and short term goals of the program.
- Program Sustainability: The program suffers low registration numbers. But, if the expectations were higher, then parents would see the value and the registration numbers would be higher.
- Now that I am aware of the ICAC and that it works on International Languages, I will gather some input because I know where I can take these issues. That there is someone working to improve the program.
- Concerns I have heard from other parents:
 - Alexander Muir – Portuguese forced on all children
 - Arabic is only offered at Ryerson school
- Language instructor comments: regarding the standards: it is a challenge for one teacher with a class that contains JK to grade 8 students. To improve the standard, we would need more teachers, so that there can be smaller classes. We do have annual report card, but there is no meeting with parents. The program would have to change to allow instructors the time for a meeting.

Lord Dufferin:

- I chose to talk about the TDSB budget. Inner city schools have strong parents and administrators who seek partnerships and sponsorships for our schools. We work hard to provide everything, but are faced with too few staff. We need more Community Support Workers (CSWs), more special education teachers, and more help in our full-day kindergartens (FDK).
- The loss of Reading Recovery is one example. I attended a school with a parent to translate. Her grade one child is struggling with literacy. Mom agreed to have daughter assessed for reading and writing. That child has been on the waiting list for assessment for an entire school year. That child is still struggling. The parent is now seeking private support.
- My daughter attends Jarvis CI, and I attend the School Council. Parents talk about the urban priority high school funding. But we don't understand how is it allocated. We have questions. We would like to understand.
- Can parents access the proposal TDSB budgets before the budget is approved? This would allow engaged parents adequate time to create responses to proposed TDSB budget, and we would have the opportunity to ask our questions. We wouldn't be scrambling to respond the night before the vote.
- Many of our schools have repair issues. How are funds for school repairs allocated? Parents want to know, so that they can speak up about the repairs needed at their schools.
- What does equity at TDSB mean to our schools? We hear the word frequently. Parents want to know.
- **General Mercer:**
- I will be speaking to you about Special Education. 50% of students at General Mercer are enrolled in special education.
- TDSB is doing a better job with early diagnostics through things like prevention, early learning centers, and full-day kindergarten.
- Convergence: There is no evidence that shows convergence benefits Inner City schools.
- When we read in the Years of Action about a 15% reduction of all special education programs, leading to a 50% inclusion rate of special education students in mainstream classes, I ask: "Has the preparatory work been done for this to happen successfully?"
- TDSB has not shared information with the parents and school communities that will be affected by this change.

- We know that Inner City schools face greater challenges for students, parents, and teachers. Will these changes in Special Education increase the challenges for schools and parents? Are schools ready?
- We need:
 - Better, clearer information that includes the challenges and benefits of inclusion for all parents and students (both mainstream and special education parents and students).
 - Full disclosure of the integration rollout plan to ease anxiety in communities.
- This is an opportunity to build fair, inclusive schools. But it requires preparation.
- I think we need to take baby steps as we move towards significantly higher inclusion rates.
- TDSB needs to demonstrate transparency with parents throughout this process.
- All schools should distribute direct correspondence from TDSB to parents in advance of a significant transformation in the system.
- Suggestions for schools with high inclusion rates:
 - Start the year with an assembly for students and parents to help them understand the programs, and understand the needs of special education students.
 - Schools with a high number of special education programs need to provide more information sharing and need to provide preparation to families so that benefits of inclusion are realized.
- Key questions:
 - How is a 50% integration rate across TDSB possible?
 - With the disproportionate number of special education students in MSIC communities, how will TDSB achieve inclusion and provide the extra supports that these schools will require?

Carlton Village

- **Independent Education Plan (IEP):** it appears blurry to many parents.
- Some parent concerns around IEPs and Individual Placement Review Committee (IPRC):
 - Parents feel they are ill-equipped for their new role as an advocate for their child.
 - IPRC meetings are overwhelming and stressful. It is very difficult to follow what they are talking about with all of the acronyms.
 - Parents do not clearly understand what their role is in the process. It is very intimidating to sit at the table with several professionals who speak in confusing terms that leave the parent on the outside.
 - Parents respond with anxiety and stress.
 - As a result, few parents look forward to attending an IEP meeting.
- Luckily, I knew other parents from CPAC who advised me that yes, you will feel confused, but do it, because it will help your child. They also advised me to request all of the information in writing so that I could spend time with it after the meeting. That helped me feel more prepared.
- Parents know best: we have a great deal of knowledge about our children, and we are an important part of the discussion.
- Parents need to work with other parents to help each other to become informed and involved in our child's education.
- What can TDSB do:
 - Make it easier for parents to understand the discussion. IEP is a different language.
 - Don't intimidate parents by asking questions like do they take drugs, and don't place unreasonable blame on parents regarding their skills.
 - Speak in plain language: drop the acronyms. Parents are left out of the conversation.
 - Parents are concerned that if one child has a learning disability, TDSB will assume siblings will have the same learning disability. Schools need to have a different starting point with each child.
- Parents need to be informed, need to step in and address the issues. Parents need to have the written evidence of their child's abilities as proof to show the school support team in a meeting.
- **EQAO:** My experience comes from my school and the cluster CPAC.

- School results are skewed because some students in the school don't write the test. Parents use the EQAO score to choose a school for their child, but the score doesn't tell the story of a school.
 - Some parents don't want kids to write because it is added stress. It is stressful when a kid comes home with a package of questions that they "have to do", and parents have to push them to do the work.
 - From the child's point of view, they are stressed by the added work.
 - Some parents are very concerned with this preparation. If kids prepare so much for the test, then how does it test what they learn in class? Parents ask: Why not have a surprise test? That would show their real skills.
 - I am willing to do more for ICAC.
- Co-chair Ingrid Palmer Thanked the parents for their excellent presentations. Palmer explained that ICAC is an advisory committee, and that ICAC will use their comments to inform its reports and delegations to the Board.

5. Model Schools for Inner Cities Update

- Simona Emiliani, Project Coordinator at MSIC, presented to the group.
- This evening, I am going to talk about the MSIC Community Resource Guide that was launched at the April Parent Conference.
- This guide that is based on the World Health Organization's Social Determinants of Health. These are the conditions in which people live and work, and how those conditions can impact health and well being. MSIC is about closing some of those gaps through a commitment to the health and well being of our school communities. Things like nutrition programs, hearing and vision screening, and our pediatric clinics in schools directly address these determinants.
- This guide is divided into five categories of resources, and it is organized by Ward across the cities. This guide shows all of the agencies and supports that are available in your area. You can also add an agency to the guide. The addition comes to MSIC, and we will review that agency for inclusion in the guide.
- All school principals in TDSB have a copy of this Resource Guide. It is also available on the TDSB web site.
- Simona showed parents how to navigate the community resources guide online.

6. ICAC Sub-Committees

Special Education: David Clandfield

- Why does ICAC have a sub-committee when there is the TDSB Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)? We are concerned specifically with those aspects of special education that seem to impact inner city communities, and that have ethno-cultural aspects.
- We have been meeting with TDSB Research, analyzing their reports, and met with Superintendent Anne Seymour to further discuss our concerns regarding Special Education and Inner City communities.
- We are also examining the things you talked about this evening, like the inclusion goals of the Years of Action (YOA), and the preparation and resources and professional development that must support those changes.
- There are parents on our committee and you are welcome.
- (Laurie Green): The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) is now collecting information from parents to identify parent issues in special education. There is a feedback form, that does not ask any personal child / school / name information. I have copies available for you here. This feedback will go back to the Board.

Q: How do we share this survey with our schools?

A: The Parent Involvement Advisory Committee (PIAC) has the form available. We are trying to work with the CPACs to distribute the form. We will provide CPAC with the email address to access the form.

Q: (To David): Have you considered that part of the preparation has to be directed, not only to the special education students, but also for the mainstream schools, so that they are prepared?

A: David: Yes, that is part of our concern. What do you mean by preparation for students? I mean Information for them, so they understand more about what the needs and behaviours of kids are.

International Languages (Graham Hollings)

- One of our projects is considering a pilot project for language classes that are integrated within the school day, and not just after school or Saturday. We are hoping to find several Model Schools that are interested in piloting such a program, where the administration and parents are enthusiastic about including language instruction within the school day.

Q: What languages would be offered?

A: The classes could be any language. Programs with fewer languages appear to be more successful to integrate within the day. The Ministry of Education funding supports fewer languages.

Q: What about accessibility to programs? Would this program include bussing? Transportation and catchment areas are a challenge for families with the existing programs.

A: I can understand that challenge. Our project has not included transportation at this point.

Q: Does the proposed program extend the school day?

A: Yes, it would extend the day by approximately 30 minutes. The Ministry funding is for 2.5hrs / week of instruction.

Fairer Ways & Greater Means: (Lesley Johnston)

- We concern ourselves with the TDSB budget. It was great to hear a parent talking about the budget within a presentation. We are pleased to connect with parents, and to raise awareness about potential budget issues of concern for inner city communities.
- Education funding should be a priority a topic of conversation during this election campaign. Ask an education question when a candidate knocks on your door.
- We have worked on the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG), advocating to make sure that funding is spent in Inner City and Model School communities, the way it is intended.
- Director Quan's Years of Action (YOA): The plans within the YOA are moving towards an Inner City Department, which would spread the important supports and programs of Model Schools to more schools and communities, as well as secondary schools in TDSB.
- One parent talked about wanting access to the TDSB budget before it is passed. The more parents know, the better they can advocate for their schools and children, and they are more comfortable deputing to TDSB committees.
- Is there going to be another round of budget talk this spring? We are waiting to hear.

Governance Sub-Committee: (Jann Houston)

- Throughout the year, we have been visiting CPAC meetings to talk with parents, to raise understanding of our work and encourage parents to participate in ICAC.
- We have had some interesting conversations about the ways you can be involved, and what the obstacles to participation are.
- The ICAC comes alive when we talk with parents about their experiences. We need to know more about how to best support TDSB students and families in Inner City communities.

7. Closing

- Co-chair Ingrid Palmer reflected on her experience as a parent member of ICAC.
 - I started with my school council and CPAC. Now with ICAC I have learned more about TDSB. The more I learn from this participation, the more empowered I am to advocate and support my children. I have made a point to get really involved and speak up and learn.
- I want to encourage you to bring your important ideas and experiences to the ICAC and to the TDSB. That is what we need to frame what we take to the Board to advocate for all children in inner city schools.
- I want to commend you for your participation and encourage you to go as far as you need to support your child.

8. Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn David Clandfield, Seconded by Nathan Gilbert. Adjourned.