

Ward 15, Toronto- Danforth

Trustee Jennifer Story

Ward Forum - Inclusion, Anti- Oppression and School Councils

Thursday January 11, 2017 from 6:30- 8:30pm

Earl Grey Senior Public School

Welcome

Kate Sanagan (Ward Council Chair)

Introductions

Intro from Trustee

Jennifer Story (Trustee)

- Meetings are an opportunity for parents and reps to share challenges that come up in our schools.
- Meetings give the Trustee and Superintendent input/feedback and opportunity to help make appropriate changes.
- Earl Grey is one of the schools they both represent.
- All participants introduced themselves.

Introduction to Earl Grey Senior PS

Bill Vatzolas (Principal) Monica MacGillis (VP)

- Earl Grey (Middle School) has 430 students.
- It's a triple stream school.
- There is a pool, large gym, and science labs. More technology has been added to the school.
- It is a safe, caring, and inclusive community. They had a welcome back assembly after break.
- The applied arts programs has 3 modules throughout the year: STEM, Family Studies, Visual Arts— students rotate through these throughout the year. They provide practical skills that students can use throughout their lives. It's an opportunity to develop hands-on life skills and promote student engagement.
- The school looks at learning styles for special needs students and programs evolve.

Inclusion, Anti- Oppression and School Councils

Guest Speakers: Cherilyn Scobie and Alison Gaymes San Vicente, Centrally Assigned Principals

Presentation:

http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/ward15/docs/2018%2001%2011%20Presentation%20Ward%2015%20Council%20Meeting%20J_Story.pdf

- We are currently looking at how to close the gap and make sure schools are safe and equitable. The Model Schools program looks at closing gaps between have and have not schools. It's time to evaluate after 10 years, looking at what more can be done, sharpen our skills, and look at how school leaders are active in their schools. Hope that we can come away with a list of ways to do this work -- strategies to take back to our schools.
- Cherilyn and Alison are working as Principal coaches. They go into secondary and elementary schools, look at who is improving and achieving. They are partners in schools, bringing experiences to the central table. Alison is also bringing her own experiences from Jane- Finch area (Westview SS) to other schools.

They are breaking down assumptions and stereotypes and looking at what students are going through. Objective is to establish concrete ideas for moving equity forward in schools. What might an inclusive school council look like?

- (Video) Talking about equity, inclusion, and oppression can be uncomfortable. Looking at unconscious biases—race, class, gender, education—acknowledging that bias is there, and learning how to move past it. Guiding questions: What do these videos have to do with equity, anti-oppression or inclusion? Why are these videos relevant? How might your school space be equitable or inequitable? Both of the videos challenge the way that the speakers are seen – as different from the mainstream, disabled, Muslim, aiming to break down stereotypes, looking at different aspects of personality.

- Cherilyn: Experience with rebranding Westview, asking the students how to rebrand the school. The motto of the school “We are Westview” or “We are Westview and we stand tall”. But if a student does not walk, it’s case of exclusion, and this was talked about at a meeting where they heard the students voice and left the motto at “We are Westview”. The intent was not to exclude but the actual impact was different.

- Videos are relevant because we can learn from them and have a dialogue. The first conversations or challenges are about race and culture are not always comfortable and disability is often overlooked. It’s a process of giving space or voice and everyone is different.

- Cherilyn: It’s setting the bar low for certain groups, seeing everyone in a group as having the same abilities, misconceptions.

- Who creates stereotypes about someone else? Who holds the power? Anyone who doesn’t hold the power has less access to opportunity. The dominant culture in a society, even when they are a minority still hold the power. It’s a dominant power. Looking at the power dynamic and privilege dynamic in a school, does someone have to ask for a newsletter to be printed?

- White, middle class, Judeo-Christian, male, tall. Where is the unearned power in schools and school councils?

- With the Enhancing Equity Report, some people saw that equity is taking power one place and putting it in another place; it’s about giving access to those who don’t have access to the same things.

- Think about who is on the parent council and that many come with one lens. The kids in French Immersion benefitted the most when all parent council members had kids in French Immersion.

- Thinking about school councils, consider how to get everyone at the table, who is at the table and who is benefitting from those decisions. If their voice is not there, their interests aren’t always represented.

- Low income, Black, Latino, Portuguese—data collection, in relation to achievement, wellbeing, etc. has always been collected and has always showed that these demographics are low achieving. Now is the time to change that fact, to shift the needle, break down biases and stereotypes, challenge stereotypes to break them down.

- Equity is a mandate from the Ministry of Education. If there are parents who are afraid to come to parent councils and feel they can’t fit in, it’s our job that we understand, identify, and eliminate stereotypes.

- 6 Key Conversations for Building Equity in your School: make your school council more inclusive, think of structures and timing of school councils, look at the goals of the school, make sure conversations are happening, be forthcoming with staff, share more with school council, ask your principals how they are achieving 3 equity goals: Achievement, Well-being, and Equity.

- Equity and Anti-Oppression is now at the forefront at the board. Principals are expected to attend training and then bring it into their schools, roll out to all staff. Schools did not have equity as a focus at this level before.

- Equity looks at school data: what do we need to do differently, how students are achieving, where are the gaps, how we think about schools, how we think about training, what we are doing about how we

are achieving. Also the perceptions about parents who don't come to parent council meetings, bringing meeting to where parents are, and creating a positive space.

- Mary Jane McNamara, Superintendent: Learning in the area of equity approaches has increased greatly in last 12 months with superintendents. All grade one students should be reading by end of grade 1; look at which students are not achieving, look at the demographics, observe what can be done within school community, look at questions that guide the work, have a conversation about purpose before process, link it back to what is going on at the school, ask the why about what is the foci about student achievement. Find out the why and consistency of purpose and process will follow.

Q & A and Discussion

We need strategies in order to reach out to people: an instructional leader for equity in schools, online surveys, phone calls to those who cannot make it out to meetings, TDSB translators for letters to parents, workshops delivered by parents, making language less of a barrier, parents in position of power teaching children their specialty, getting people to speak and listen to each other.

Comment: The issue of inequity is growing. People were avoiding Blake PS. Some parents are now keeping students in English as a form of activism. Busing has impacted poor families and inequities face us every day. There seems to be a division in investments in various programs.

Trustee Story: The difference between perception and reality. A range of choices to some degree has created stratification within the board. When we talk about how to fix this in an austerity climate (scarcity of resources) people naturally start to think that solutions will require taking from here to give to there. That is not the approach we are taking as a board. More valuable to talk about diversity of programming and making opportunities available to everyone. Is a specialized arts program good for children? Of course. So now what? How do we make sure that we open up and challenge barriers? How can we break down the barriers and make sure racialized or low income or differently abled students are included, welcome, and at home in all our programs, for example?

Dundas PS—It is diverse, a Model School, and recently added French Immersion. There is a fear that it will be less diverse as a result. Info is translated for parents (predominantly Chinese population doesn't attend school council very often).

Leslieville PS—Similar situation. There is an equity committee to try and make sure councils continuously question themselves. It's not good enough if privileged parents are the only voices at the table. If you have school councils as a social event, at someone's home, in a bar, it's not really a good idea. It creates a barrier. We need to question and challenge what is being done, continuously ask what is the best way to reach out.

Alison: Every school in the TDSB has a learning coach. They not only support teachers. They support school councils as well on request of school council, through the principal. They work for the board and have the skill set necessary. They are funded by the board.

Question: How do you maintain the momentum and training. How do you find the speakers? How to meet the demand for more education and make sure movement is in the right direction?

Alison: Mobilize and use your power to change things. The goal of equity is to change our attitudes and beliefs. Equity is hard and takes persistence.

Comment: To change our attitudes and perceptions, new councils have to learn things all over again. Is the process sustainable? Can we sustain schools, a system, policies, and practices that are equitable? Where do parents enter the dialogue?

Trustee Story will work on motion for equity and inclusion and support for school councils to do this kind of learning/training/planning, with PIAC reps.