

Ward 11 Forum Meeting Notes

Tuesday, January 31st

Attendance: Cedarvale CS, Deer Park Jr/Sr PS, Forest Hill Jr/Sr PS, Hodgson Sr PS, Maurice Cody PS, McMurrich, NTCI, Northern, Oriole Park PS

Welcome from Robert Nigro, Principal of Maurice Cody Public School

Introduction of Trustee Shelley Laskin and Louise Brown

Shelley reminded all she was an involved parent at MC beginning 25 years ago and that she loved waiting for the school council meeting minutes that Louise sent out.

Welcomed everyone in attendance and introduced Superintendent Kathleen Garner,

Trustee Report

- Budget 2017-18 process - 3 year plan presented at last Committee – after years of difficult decisions, operating budget is sustainable – by no means appropriate funding, but no expectation of program cuts
- There is a possible shifting of funds
- Once detailed reports provided as a result of Enriching Equity Report, difficult decisions regarding funding will need to be made, for example, board decision that all school will receive a minimum of half-time library – not funded
- Waiting to hear from City re their budget decisions: currently proposing to cancel child care occupancy grant – costs will go up; proposing to remove operating funding for 10 more pools (3 were removed last year, including Brown)
- Discussions on staffing will begin around March Break
- Vaughan proposed to be kept as a TDSB core holding
- Feb 1st – African History month being kicked off by Minister of Education at the TDSB

Parent Involvement Advisory Committee (PIAC) – Wilmar Kortleever, co-chair:

- Reminded everyone that PIAC supports parents and school councils
- PIAC is provincially mandated – they consult with both government and trustees
- PIAC school council recognition event on Feb 23rd – deadline Feb 14th
- There will be a webchat with John Malloy on Feb 2nd on Special Education
- Hold the date for joint conference (Special Education, Mental Health, etc) on February 23

French as a Second Language Advisory Committee (FSLAC) – Wilmar Kortleever, Ward 13 Rep:

- Advises on all things French – Core, immersion etc.
- weigh in on about catchment areas and teaching curriculum
- Feb 2nd – deadline registering for extended French

Louise Brown, long-time education reporter, Toronto Star (and former Cody parent):

- Wrote Growing Pains column for Toronto Star – a parenting column had stories to share – and reported on education for many years
- Modern technology has changed the way schools and parents relate, just the way it has changed every other part of our lives. With twitter and Facebook, schools can send photos – for example, on a field trip parents send photos - schools are reaching out with class Facebook pages, School Council web pages, teachers' Twitter streams, special software - Class Dojo.
- Is this making a difference in how parents are involved in school life? I think so.
- Why should we care? Why does it matter if parents are involved?
- There have been decades of research into the impact on a child's learning when his parents are involved in his learning, from showing an interest in homework to helping at the school.

- Sends a message to the child that this education is important. The more a family supports the child's learning, in time each day and over the years, the better the child does, and the longer they pursue education.
- The more parents express their expectations for their children - and I don't think this actually means helicopter parenting or pressure, but the more they know you believe in them and know they can succeed - the better they actually do.
- Some studies suggested children whose parents have above-average involvement show success rates some 30% higher than those whose parents have below-average involvement rates.
- Educators call it a "dynamic force." Even when poverty and other demographic factors throw up roadblocks, the likelihood of success improves when parents nurture that school-family connection.
- It helps with reading, from K to 8
- It helps with math.
- "the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status but the extent to which that student's family is able to:
 - Create a home environment that encourages learning
 - Express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children's achievement and future careers
 - Become involved in their children's education at school and in the community"
- "A New Generation of Evidence; the Family is Critical to Student Achievement," by A.T. Henderson and N. Berla
- Just makes sense - if you're involved, you're also there to spot early signs of struggle.
- HOW CAN THEY HELP?
- The standard is, of course, fundraising. And to be an extra pair of hands in the classroom. A reading buddy. Help after school - coach team. Help with school play. Hobby clubs
- SO WHY DON'T MORE PARENTS HELP, especially at the school level?
- Research suggests many don't feel welcome when they first come. They're intimidated. AND they overestimate the time commitment that will be expected of them.
- The good news is, each of these barriers can be fixed.
 - Making new parents feel welcomed, by older parents.
 - Some schools have a Volunteer Committee that welcomes new parents, and calls them personally to connect. Meet for tea. YOU become the person they call with questions. Tell them that.
 - A twist on this is New Family Ambassadors, a sort of buddy system, or mentor for new parents. They follow up big school newsletters with a phone call to point out some highlights, get them excited...
 - Welcome dinner with tables mixed - name tags, senior parent at each table.
 - Many schools organize parent socials over the summer before school starts, to break the ice and chat up the school in a relaxed atmosphere.
- Fear of Volunteering:
 - Let them know you appreciate whatever they have to give, whether they can come every afternoon and read with the kindergarten, or do a shopping run for Costco the weekend before Funfair.
 - You do this by showing them, on a Time and Talent checklist, how broad the variety there is. You can come every day?

- Help in class, reading buddy, maybe help with an after-school team or homework club, or a club that features a passion of yours. Yoga. Writing. Math.
- A few hours a week? Maybe a School Council Committee. Or from home, help produce some School Council newsletters
- A few hours a month? Maybe a more central job on School Council. Help with the odd field trip.
- Few hours a year? Help with big fundraiser on day, come in to share expertise on unit of study
- Some schools actually ask the parent how many hours they have free - per week, month or term.... And respect that.
- A smart school has a student write out a Thank You note -by hand - to parents who volunteer, within the following three days.
- How do you stick-handle reluctance? Assume EVERYONE is busy. Ask the parent in person. Ask them a few times. If they say they're too busy, suggest they might take on responsibility with a friend, or another parent. Co-leaders are very successful.
- If they say they would do a committee but can't make School Council meetings, offer to present the report for them. If they really can't, ask them if they can suggest someone - and if it works out, thank them! If they say No to what you ask, ask how they see themselves maybe helping?
- Some schools set up a Temp Pool for parents who can't commit on a regular basis but can sometimes pinch-hit if someone gets sick.
- HOW to MAKE PARENTS WANT TO COME!
 - Don't micro-manage them.
 - Serve food at meetings. Have a set end-time. Rotate meeting times. Bring in a speaker on a hot topic - homework is usually a slam dunk. Math. Sleep. Even manners!
 - Then there are the fun-raisers that get parents involved for morale, not a practical purpose. Movie-pizza nights are pretty foolproof. Whatever serves your community. Cricket. Skating. Cooking...
 - Also, while teachers and principals send out positive news about students and classes, so can the School Council! Twitter feed? FB page? Send out stats on the impact of parents on their child's education...
 - Live-stream your meetings? TDSB does it...

Discussion and sharing of ideas:

- Louise spoke about her column called Cool Schools – to hear about 'good news' stories...the media does go to stories of conflict
- Call a newspaper if you have a good story/unusual story/ solution to a problem/ topical stories
- Always have an agenda
- Keep to timing and end on time
- Concerns about the succession of parent volunteers
- Felt unwelcome at first school council
- Having a rep. at kindergarten night or curriculum night is a great idea
- Maybe a 'school council for dummies' sheet to explain the workings
- school council President shows up at Kindergarten Night
- JK parent can start with something like cutting out, etc. for teacher
- They have a Class Connector – SC chair calls class reps and they call their parents

Shelley – created school council e-mail network – use for sharing of info/lending (popcorn machine etc.) / ideas

PIAC – maybe they could do a one pager re: school councils to share with Principals

Fundraising:

- regulations in place from TDSB
- How much fundraising is enough?
- Look outward
- Equity will be in mind when fundraising policy comes up for revision
- Controversial issue
- If no volunteers come forward – 'sometimes you need a vacuum before you can fill it'