

WRAPSC Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, April 4, 2017

Forest Heights Secondary School Library

Attendance: 24 WRAPSC reps

Guests: Nick Manning, Chief Communications Officer & Kathi Smith, Trustee

Welcome – meeting start at 7:00pm

Approval of Agenda

Motioned by: Glenn Anderson

Seconded by: Kerri Gettliffe

Approval of February Minutes

Motioned by: Erica Beck

Seconded by: Kerri Gettliffe

WRAPSC Co-Chair Report

Laurie Tremble (PIC/WRAPSC co-chair)

Events of Note:

Parent Involvement Committee - Parent Engagement Event April 8th 2017. The theme is Empowering Students Through Parent Engagement. Volunteers are still needed. The event is free, with free childcare for children age 2-11 (out of diapers). This will be held at Bluevale Collegiate.

The organization, Parents Engaged in Education is having a free conference on April 22 in Toronto entitled *Dream Big: The School Council Event*. Workshops include fundraising, anti-bullying strategies, recruiting and retaining council members, electronic communications and social media and more. Find out more at dream big.parentsengagedineducation.ca.

Other:

The application for **PRO Grants** is now available. Search for PRO Grants on the Ministry of Education website for more information and the link to the application page. The deadline for application is May 25, 2017. If you have questions about the grant, feel free to contact WRAPSC through gmail or Facebook.

On Saturday, April 1, I attended the 8th annual **PIC symposium** along with PIC co-chair Brent Hutzal and PIC member Hend Shalan. This meeting is a chance for PIC members from numerous board to get together for some professional development as well as sharing of best practices. A report on the conference will be posted on the PIC website and will be send out through WRAPSC in the near future.

Two items of note for parents: The Ministry has recently released a document entitled *A Parent's Guide: Financial Literacy in Ontario Schools, Grades 4 to 12* as part of their initiative to ensure all students have a basic understanding of personal finance, etc. This guide will be available on the Ministry website, but isn't there yet.

Also, the government recently announced new regulations for OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program), which provides financial aid to help students pay for college or university. These new regulations will make tuition free for some students and will provide some assistance to more students than before. Go to ontario.ca/osap for more information.

This is our second-last meeting of the school year and I wanted to plant the bug in your ear about open positions on the WRAPSC steering committee for the 2017-18 school year. At the October meeting, I will be at the end of four years as WRAPSC/PIC Co-Chair. At that same meeting, Jessica's term as WRAPSC Co-Chair will be ending. Both of these positions will need to be filled in October. In addition, we will have openings for a treasurer, a secretary and members-at-large. Of these open positions, some require you to sit on both WRAPSC and PIC. Some require you to sit only on WRAPSC. If you would like to talk to any current members of the WRAPSC steering committee about the open positions, please email us or see us after the meeting.

Related to this is the issue of the potential restructuring of PIC and WRAPSC. As we discussed at the February meeting, we will be putting off this discussion until next year. We will revisit the discussion of the relationship between WRAPSC and PIC in the fall of 2017 with the hope of making a decision at both WRAPSC and PIC in November/December or January 2018 at the latest.

Presentation - KidsAbility

Tracey Weiler (KidsAbility Foundation Board Member)

This year marks the 60th anniversary of KidsAbility, which started as the KW Rotary Children's Centre. KidsAbility supports over 6000 children and youth with therapy and support services throughout Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge and Guelph. Primarily funded through the Ontario Ministry of Children & Youth Services, KidsAbility also relies on donors for funding. Many children wait for services from KidsAbility even though early intervention is key.

The Kids Can't Wait campaign is a yearly campaign run by KidsAbility to raise money to reduce waitlist times by providing equipment and services to therapists and staff and supporting programs such as Spark which take kids with mild needs off the waitlist by providing them with quick, targeted interventions. The Radiothon to be held at Conestoga Mall on May 5 is a major fundraiser for the Kids Can't Wait Campaign.

KidsAbility is encouraging all schools to consider supporting them by getting involved in the Radiothon or by hosting another fundraising campaign this spring. Ideas for campaigns schools can run include:

- Adopt a Butterfly - for \$1 or \$2 kids get a colourful paper butterfly to add to a wall in their school;
- Plasma Car Races - for \$500 a group can buy entry into a plasma car race organized by KidsAbility. KidsAbility provides the cars and track;
- Bake Sales;
- whatever creative idea you have!

Eleven public schools are currently on board to run a campaign this spring with proceeds going to KidsAbility and all principals have been contacted with information on how to get involved. If your school is interested in running a fundraiser for KidsAbility, contact your principal and Tracey Weiler, tracey@traceyweiler.com.

Presentation - Communications Update

Nick Manning (Chief Communications Officer)

One item communications staff is working on for this year is a change to the School Council Annual Report to add life to that document and help generate excitement about the work of school councils. One way to do this is to encourage councils, staff and parents to send communications information about innovative and successful events they run.

There will be opportunities in the future to advise communications on their long-term (3-5 year) communications plan.

Projects communications have worked on this year include:

- purpose statement campaign and communication of the strategic plan;
- social media - addition of Instagram as a way to engage students;
- Good News reports to trustees.

Coming soon is a campaign focussing on our purpose statement: Innovating Tomorrow by Educating Today. Communications will take a photo of a current student (e.g., kindergarten student) and use digital tools to suggest a future for that student (e.g., the kindie student in a business suit walking down Bay Street having designed a new international currency system with their kindergarten teachers walking beside them). Attached to the photos will be links to resources for parents (e.g., links to kindergarten registration info).

Near future plans include a budget ask for money to fund one more staff member and a budget for deep consultation with the community on the long-term communications plan.

Question: Are you working on parents being able to get the info they need?

Yes but this takes time and will require a culture shift in some cases. Some of this work is beyond the mandate of communications.

Question: Are you going to support councils and parent volunteers?

We will try to get at how that can be done through our consultations. School Day could solve some of this but there are still challenges with this (e.g., not everyone signs up to School Day).

Question: Who is responsible for the school websites?

This is site specific. In secondary schools it is often a VP or a teacher who volunteers. In elementary it is more difficult to find a volunteer. If there isn't a volunteer, it falls to the principal. It is true that not all school websites are well-maintained. Having the site creates an expectation for current and useful content which isn't always realized. Question back to the community is do we really need websites for each individual school? If key info (bell times, staff lists etc.) are maintained centrally, would that be enough?

Question: Can you explain what kind of stories you want councils to share with you?

If you were to pick your council's top event for the year, that would be the one to share. It should be innovative, novel, successful. There are different ways to define innovation and success. It doesn't necessarily need to be something that drew a lot of parents to the school. It just needs to be something you are proud of that you think other people should know about. Staff can support it on social media, attend an event, create a good news story to present to trustees or online etc.

If you submit a story to communications, make sure they know council was involved. If the event has already happened, you can submit pictures. You can submit pictures with your school council report as well. Also, let communications know if you have partnered with a community organization such as KidsAbility.

WEFI is another fundraising tool for the board that needs more exposure. If your school/council uses WEFI funds for something, let communications know and be clear about where funding is coming from in your school council annual report.

Question: Do we need permissions for pictures that include students?

Yes, but principals should already have this. If in doubt, talk to your principal. They will know who shouldn't be photographed.

NOTE: Nick Manning's presentation will be provided separately.

Small Group Discussion on Communication

This is our annual opportunity to sit in small groups to ask questions and discuss issues common to councils and parents in the WRDSB.

We are focussing our discussions this year on issues related to communication. Below you will find three themes. Each theme has questions listed under it that may help direct your conversation. Please feel free to work through each question in the theme or to focus on one that seems to resonate with your group. Note that we will have 15-20 minutes per theme.

Once we have worked through each of the three themes, we will have a chance to share our thoughts with the whole group. You also have a notetaker/moderator at your table who will share minutes from your group's discussions with us to be compiled into collective minutes for the meeting to share with the rest of WRAPSC.

Theme 1: WRDSB Website and School Websites

Do you regularly visit the WRDSB website and/or your school website? Why or why not?

What types of information are you looking for from the WRDSB or school website? Are you finding that information?

What information/resources would you like from the WRDSB/school website that you can't find or that is unavailable there?

Do you find the WRDSB/school website easy to navigate and appealing? Why or why not?

What suggestions would you make to improve the WRDSB website or your school website?

Discussion

- Improve search function. A simple search brings up too many and often out of date or not requested information.

- Update WRDSB webpage and remove school specific websites. Include drop down menus to search for Schools. Include a more streamlined page, with easy to navigate search buttons. Examples include Parent Information, School's (with a current staff list including email address and extension)
- Make WRDSB page mobile friendly. Right now you get the twitter feed first.
- School Day needs improvement. Not enough teachers use all the functions resulting in too many communication possibilities that are not consistently used.
- Stop planner/agenda sales if teachers are not going to use them. Waste of money to families.
- Too many school to school website differences. Some school are good at using the websites other schools never update information.
- Sandhill site is well used
- usability/need changes between elementary and high school
- each school needs someone on staff who is dedicated to the task
- size of school and its available resources impact the website
- High School uses the website more because of the high number of activities, and because the students, not just the parents, use it
- board website needs to be more user friendly
 - it has good information, but its too hard to find things
 - more "basic" information needs to be available
 - Its not up to date (current superintendent listing is out of date)
- SchoolDays is well used at Sandhill (information is easy to access and accurate), but not used at Laurelwood
- SchoolDays requires staff buy in to be effective
- it is helpful if you subscribe to the news feed of the website, but can result in overlapping information between the school and the board
- Social Media: Facebook and twitter can be useful, but depends on the principal's attitude
- Information on the board website needs to be divided between elementary and high school
- given the prevalent industry of the Waterloo area, this board's website should be better so as to attract families of the tech industry. Those who work in that field will use the board site to decide on the school for their child(ren). The Strategic Plan site is a good example and the other pages need to be brought up to that level
- no one solution will work for all schools/people/needs
- Key point - it would be nice if the parent could easily and directly respond to messages from the school, such as responding to a field trip message to indicate their child can't attend or that their child enjoyed it
- most people visit the board site to find our or try to find out information
- currently the web site often lacks the content & resources parents are looking for, or if it's there, it isn't organized/listed in the way parents are looking - hard to find
- school staff, not necessarily the principal, need to be provided the time to actually maintain their web sites
- school sites need to be kept current
- short messages are best - e.g., provide parents with a short easy to understand message instead of a long policy/procedure type page of information
- Visit school website regularly- hopeful that there is more information, look for updates
- Send out blast in email blast for the high-school
- School Day not to straight forward and hard to figure out if trying make multiple purchases. Ordering different day is a pain. One school not using school day yet - SouthRidge. Being trickled in.

- Visit Board website when necessary for board interest, global interest.
- School websites are hard to locate the teacher emails, using google to locate the staff list, information on the school website not updated, still information from the year before. For the elementary children nice to see what opportunities are available for children. IE choir, chess club
- On webiste, would like to see when things are happening in tryouts for teams, when the teams are playing
- What I'm looking for I can't find it. IEP's, jargon, lots of scrolling. Speaker used a different site to locate the information that I'm looking for.
- Resources information that should be easy to find
- Positive- getting the email updates, some teachers are sending mass emails with an update
- More accurate search engine for locating resources
- Finding quick blurbs about board info, PIC, WRAPSC are full of jargon
- Dumb it down, summarize with link to the BIG story

Theme 2: Communication Between the Board/School/Teachers and Parents

Do you regularly receive communication from the WRDSB? Is the information you receive helpful? What other information would you like to receive from the board?

Do you regularly receive communication from your school? Is the information you receive helpful? What other information would you like to receive from your school?

Do you regularly receive communication from your child's teacher(s)? Is the information you receive helpful? What other information would you like to receive from your child's teacher(s)?

What method of communication do you prefer when receiving information from the Board/school/teacher (e.g., text, email, social media, website, phone calls, paper notices etc.)? What methods of communication do not work for you?

How often are you as a parent or as a council consulted by the WRDSB/school/teacher? On what issues are you consulted? How is that consultation conducted? Are there issues you would like to provide feedback on that you haven't been asked about? Types of issues that councils may consult with staff on include Code of Conduct, dress code, school improvement planning, student well-being, safety issues, PIC and PRO grant spending etc.

Discussion

- School Facebook pages and WRAPSC Facebook pages are most current. Board seems unapproachable with INFO, and it is difficult to get school administrators got send out timely information.
- Info seems to always be in the past, never present or upcoming info shared.
- Add relevant school resources to websites such as CYW, Kidsability, Settlement workers, volunteers, welcome packages, updated school council info.
- The school websites for most seem to be vastly underused by administrators, too many restrictions on who can update information, and there for not used by families.
- Communication that works from Teachers, email and phone calls. Keep it consistent and don't change communication methods throughout the year.

- School Council's are consulted by WRDSB/School's/Teachers typically at the end of the school year. Council makes the plans at the beginning of the year. The timing is off. It is also very hard to find out what the school needs as most council members are made up of representatives who cannot be at the school through the day. And day time volunteers are not able to attend evening council meetings. This makes for a huge break in communication and needs assessments.
- Secondary schools are often more involved in Student issues, learning ect. Where elementary school councils are used for fundraising.
- Seesaw is a great program for elementary/kindergarten classes
- Parents can send audio messages to the teachers through Seesaw
- SchoolDays is a great program as well, and information is sent as needed
- Twitter is used for grade 2-6
- Parents' access to technology impacts the effectiveness of the programs
- many take technology for granted (i.e. access to devices and to wifi)
- Parents use the following with success: website, social media, SchoolDays, Seesaw, phone
- Parents use the following without success: phones
- Parents like to have access to information from inside the classroom (what are the students learning?)
- need to have a mechanism for feedback from the parents to the teachers (feedback loop instead of one way communication)
- Audio programs are helpful
- messages coming to the parent should be targeted/customized for them/their child(ren) needs/ interest/etc. rather than sending out lots of generalized messages. For example, parents shouldn't be getting messages relating to schools they don't have children at, or grades that their children aren't in. Basically I guess this means that outgoing messages should be "filtered" to make sure they might be of interest to the parent receiving them.
- the use of automated phone calls are a good approach provided the messages are short and number of calls are kept down (1 or 2 per week).
- everyone would like to see better and more communications/interaction between parents and teachers.
- the need to have teachers available for interaction/communication when parents are available.
- there isn't that much of formal consultation by the board/school/teacher with school councils and parents, most is more informal in nature.
- Just want the email information once. Too many, if I sign up with ANY WRDSB mass email it will only come once. For example from the school.
- Suggested to receive the emails should have a menu to select which information you like to receive.
- Getting info from school with school day
- Some still getting a paper newsletter from school
- one teacher sends info on school-day.
- One teacher out of 16 communicate with me
- One tweet a day (SK), other teacher using remind however it didn't send me a note to check.
- Yes/No some teachers are still using the planner

- At the high school level I get information if you ask for it. Grade 9 and 11. Meet the teacher is very informal.
- I'd like to hear how my child is doing. If there is an issue with grades I'd like to know.
- At what point do the teachers consider talking to the parents?
- Teachers can deny the old fashion interview
- Want to know what's going on in my child's school
- Parents should get info about changes in the classroom environment with as much notice as possible. For example an LTO teacher, principal taking a leave an absences. Realize that the information isn't going to be easy to deliver but need transparency.
- Email is ok form of communication.
- Rather a phone call if things are a concern
- Text from the teacher is ok too
- Something direct and easy to find is the best way to communicate
- School events should be made public and reminder's sent
- Changes in grades and behaviours need to be communicated
- Challenges when not seeing the teacher at the end of the day
- Using tools like Remind that the teachers are sending out reminders that there are a test coming up
- Children can chat together, parents can chat together. Teacher can see it. Remind App works very well
- In kindergarten we use Seesaw. We use it for documentation and to communicate with parents
- Twitter is a good tool, lacks information
- It's challenge that everyone is something different.
- Parents need to be able to respond quickly
- Positive
 - Email blast outs
 - School day
 - Planners or communication log in the younger grades
 - Trying to improve the web site is HOPEFUL!
 - The information is relevant and helpful
 - The information is available when I need it

Theme 3: Communication Between School Councils and Their Parent Communities

What methods of communication does your school council use to reach its parent community?
 What methods of communication work best?

What challenges does your council face in reaching out to its parent community?

What resources does your council need from the Board to communicate more effectively with its parent community?

Does your school staff (administration, office staff, teachers etc.) assist with council communications? If so, how? If not, why not?

Does your council ever solicit feedback from its parent community or is the communication mainly one direction (from council to parents)? If you do solicit feedback from parents, on what issues and how is that feedback collected?

Discussion

- School Councils reach out to families by facebook, email list and twitter
- The challenges councils face in reaching out to the parent community is communication and accessing the parent community. Parents who are available to attend council meetings in the evening are not typically the same parents who volunteer in the schools during the day. They do not know the needs of the schools or even the kids and families at the school. Decisions are made by a few select people who are not able to follow through during the day.
- Besides WRAPSC (to the few school councils who use it), and the school council handbook. There are not many resources from the Board.
- The school staff will help communicate, if they have time.
- School councils try and solicit feedback, paper surveys seem to work if they can get into the hands of families at an event. Electronic surveys have very little response.
- Most used communication tools: SchoolDays, website, twitter and Facebook
- Some schools parent council has own dedicated twitter account for communication
- Needs are different for high school parents/parent council:
 - principals tend to talk to the parents directly as needed
 - information tends to be more administrative specific
 - parent council has a different role
 - often have separate music or arts parent council
 - fundraising tends to be class or activity specific, and not for the whole school as with elementary
- School councils should have a communications person/position
- Newsletters do work
- There is no one communication solution that works
- Facebook can/does work, but keep the number of post down as too many posts will end up in all being ignored.
- asking for open ended feedback usually just results in more criticism than positive feedback.
- Councils use Facebook, School website –useless minutes are NEVER updated, Email, School Day, Kindergarten night can sign-up and will receive the council email
- Not being able to access the school website makes it difficult for councils
- Minutes should be updated on school website
- Staff will assist with council communication, if we ask.
- Some admin is on the ball!
- Still missing the information from the school. Still seeking information from the school and information is delayed
- At the elementary level a survey is sent out to families to decide how/what families would like to see from council
- Consistency from the board that all councils are actually following the “rules”
- Admin have set jobs. Leave the council information at the school if admin staff are transferred

Next meeting - May 2, 2017.

Adjourned at 9:00 pm.