

**NIAGARA FALLS CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
DISTRICT PARENT COMMITTEE**

**Minutes**

**Tuesday, October 25, 2022, at 6:00 P.M.**

**Second Floor Conference Room – Administration Building**

**Present:** Makeesha Booker, Dasha Colvin, Tomasina Cook, Stephanie Dolson, Laura Hood, Karen Howard, Denise Jackson, Heather Johnson, Stacey Kok, Lynn Pasek, Charlotte Robinson, Staci Rowe, Raquel Satarian, Cindy Smith, Marlo Stearns, Dot Swift, Kaylee Ulrich, Nick Vilardo, and Wendy Tedesco.

**Schools Represented:** Abate, Cataract, GJ Mann, Hyde Park, Kalfas, Maple, 79<sup>th</sup> Street, LaSalle Prep, and NFHS

**Schools Missed:** Bloneva Bond Primary School and Gaskill

**Contact Phone Number:** Catherine Sullivan, Central Office Ph: 286-4217 Email: csullivan@nfschools.net

**Philosophy And Purpose of the District Parent Committee:**

**Procedural Matters**

1. Take your nametag when you come in and initial the sign-in sheet.
2. All concerns should be taken to your building principal or School Quality Council before being brought up at the District Parent Committee meeting.
3. The information discussed at the DPC meeting is to be relayed back to your school parent group.
4. At least one representative from each school should attend each meeting. If one representative cannot attend a certain meeting, they should notify their alternate representative.
5. The meeting agendas and minutes can be found at [www.nfschools.net](http://www.nfschools.net) under the “Parent & Guardian” tab, “District Parent Committee” heading.

**Welcome & Introductions**

Ms. Stearns thanked everyone for attending tonight’s meeting and proceeded to introduce district staff in attendance and the first presenter.

**News and Updates**

Mr. Mark Laurrie – Thanks to everyone for attending tonight’s meeting. If there is anything needed for meat raffle, just let him know. He is sure it will be successful.

Evolv security systems are arriving for all elementary schools. The system adds another layer of security for people entering through each school’s main doors and is part of a larger initiative. Mr. Laurrie apologizes for having to install this type of security, but it is necessary. Many other public places will probably go to a similar security check system as well. It would be irresponsible of the District not to install this type of a system.

November 8 is an election day and will be a fully remote learning day for students. The reason for this is so staff and students can practice remote learning in case it were to become necessary. Also, it provides an opportunity to ensure that staff and students know how to use technology. Mr. Laurrie anticipates there will be some issues along the way, but we will work them out. Currently 8 out of 11 District schools are used as polling sites. Mr. Laurrie is working towards no longer using schools as polling sites, as he feels it presents an unnecessary risk to students.

On January 17, the District will have voting on a new capital projects referendum for permission to raise the borrowing limit to \$29 Million to cover the cost of improvement projects at all schools. The District would get 98 percent reimbursement from NYS on funds spent. That means the District would only pay for 2 percent of the cost for the improvements. Capital projects help to make our schools better and put local laborers to work. Capital projects help to keep tax dollars here in Niagara Falls. To help cover the costs not reimbursed by NYS, the District could use casino funds. One item that would be part of this round of capital projects would be a secured vestibule at each school. Visitors to the school would be buzzed through the first door into a secured vestibule. The secured vestibule will have a pass-through window for parents dropping off something for their child. If the visitor needs to come into the school to meet with a teacher or principal, they would present their driver's license in order to obtain a visitor's pass and then be buzzed through the second set of doors and pass through the Evolv scanner. Someone would then escort the visitor to their destination. The Administration Building, Community Education Center and the DiFrancesco Center will also have secured vestibules installed.

Another part of the capital project would be to install an alarm and a camera on all exterior doors. If a door was left open for a set period of time, an audible alarm will sound. If anyone leaves an exterior door open, he or she will face disciplinary repercussions.

Because NFHS is now 23 years old, the building needs a new heating and cooling system. Kalfas Elementary School and Bloneva Bond Primary School will also have new heating and cooling systems installed.

A new roof will be put on the Community Education Center, which houses all of the District's records. A fire suppression system will also be added to protect the records in case of a fire.

Bloneva Bond Primary School will be the first school to add a greenhouse, which will be built near the playground. Gaskill, Kalfas and NFHS will also get a greenhouse. The greenhouses will be used all 12 months of the year. Students can learn about plants as part of their curriculum.

The fire doors inside NFHS must be replaced.

Finally, air conditioning will be installed at both prep schools. This is the most expensive part of the project due to the age of the buildings.

If the referendum passes in January, the District will proceed to obtain all diagrams and plans which will be sent to NYSED for approval. Once approved by NYSED, the projects can go out for bid in November. If all goes well, work would begin next summer. The prep schools air conditioning project would take about two years to complete.

The District just had an external audit performed by Drescher & Malecki. There were no findings and not one dollar out of place. This allows the District to possibly improve its bond rating, which helps obtain better borrowing rates. Mr. Vilardo stated that when he started as a Board member, the District's bond rating was B-, now the rating is at A. Financially, the District is in good shape and has close to \$30 Million in reserves. However, the District must be judicious with these funds to prevent ever having to cut programming or staff. The District may have some financial exposure as a result of the Child Victims Act, as there are some claims that go back to the 1960s and 70s when there was no insurance coverage available for those types of things.

COVID cases are up this week. The District is not required to report or track COVID cases, but is keeping a close eye on the situation. Mr. Laurrie asks that people to be courteous to fellow students and staff. If someone is not feeling well, it is best to stay home.

The District will be installing a new telephone system around spring break time. Funds have already been allocated to cover the cost. Funds have also been allocated for 420 new classroom interactive boards with casting capabilities.

The Technology Committee will make a recommendation to the Board as to which interactive board will be purchased in January.

The District is in the process of researching an app that will track bus location for parents. There is a high need for a tracking app, especially with buses running late due to the bus driver shortage. Eventually, hoping to add the ability to include student roster management to the app.

Mr. Laurrie requested that Mr. Carella revamp the District's Grades K-8 summer programming. Many students registered to participate in the program, but did not end up attending. DPC members suggested working with PAL in conjunction with the programs they run in the summer and also keeping in mind parent work schedules in order to make it more convenient. Mr. Laurrie asked DPC members to reach out to other parents to get suggestions for the summer programming and relay any feedback to him. Mr. Laurrie will relay this feedback to Mr. Carella and ask him to make a presentation to DPC in January regarding the summer programming.

Throughout the District, administrators are working towards strategies to reduce the number of out-of-school suspensions. Last year's number of suspension were exceptionally high due to students returning to in-person learning after the pandemic. Part of reducing suspensions is working on continued academic growth and social/emotional growth. Students need social/emotional support more and more.

Mr. Laurrie mentioned the results of the NAEP test, which is a national assessment given to students every two years across the country at certain grade levels. Because education is the responsibility of each state individually and each state is different, Mr. Laurrie feels there is not a lot of fidelity to the test results. The NFCSD uses NWEA and other testing programs to track each student's growth. NFCSD has small class sizes, with only a few exceptions. It is important to focus on differentiating instruction and monitoring student growth. NYSED has not released the graduation rate report yet. The NFCSD dropout rate has decreased to 7 percent, but there is still need to improve. All programs are working well. At NFHS, there are 250 students participating in internships. College courses at NFHS are going well. The Head Start program is coming along. The biggest challenge is finding quality employees, as their rate of pay is lower than the NFCSD due to a finite amount of funds available in the grant. Pending Board approval, the substitute teacher pay rate will be raised to \$140/day for uncertified and \$180 for certified. Substitutes must have a four-year degree. Teaching Associate pay was increased to \$20 an hour in hopes of creating a resource of building based associates. Anyone interested should fill out an application. The District will cover the cost of fingerprinting. Applicants must be drug tested and get a physical. The drug test does not include screening for marijuana. Associates can purchase benefits at a 50 percent discount. If an associate has good attendance, the cost of benefits is lowered. Anyone with a two-year degree can apply to become a teaching assistant. The District is willing to work with students who are in college and can only work a few days a week. Mr. Laurrie is meeting with NU on Friday to propose a change in how we recruit teachers. In a student's fourth year of college, Mr. Laurrie is proposing that the student do a residency with the District and get paid a stipend to do the residency.

In closing, Mr. Laurrie thanked all DPC member for attending tonight's meeting and for being loyal parents.

### **Early Head Start**

Dr. Lynnette Haley O'Stewart thanked the DPC for inviting her to speak about the Early Head Start program. Head Start has been around a long time and is federally funded. The whole idea behind Head Start in the beginning was to fight the war on poverty. Head Start exists all over the country. Niagara Falls is part of Region 2 and serves children up to age four from families with low income, according to the Poverty Guidelines published by the Federal government. Head Start advocates work with families to help them obtain health insurance, find a doctor, and establish goals. Dr. Haley O'Stewart feels Head Start is fortunate to be working under a district with an engaged superintendent and a dedicated Board of Education. The District received the award last September, and the transition was complete in January. There are two locations, one at the Community Education Center for Early Head

Start and the DiFrancesco Center for Head Start. Dr. Haley O'Stewart is hoping to have an open house at some point in the near future. At the Community Education Center, there are 3 classrooms up and running. There are enough children on the waiting list to create two additional classes. First need to find staff for the additional classes, which has been a challenge since the pay rate is lower through the grant compared to District salaries. Planning to do a wage comparability study to provide justification to get good rationale for wage increases. The average class size is eight children (two adults for every eight children for Early Head Start, as infants and toddlers require a lot of supervision). Head Start regulations allow to go up to nine students per class, but then would have to add another staff member, so would not really make sense to do so. It is imperative to ensure that there are two staff members in the classroom at all times. If not, the District could be fined.

Registration for Head Start takes place at Central Office. The registration documents required are typically the same as required by the District, but because the program is federally funded, some extra documentation is necessary. Placement in Head Start is not first-come/first-served, but goes according to what child is the neediest. The program uses a center-based design. Staff members conduct two home visits per year. The first visit takes place before school starts to welcome the child and help make the child feel more comfortable. The second visit takes place mid-way through the school year. Also, there are in-school parent/teacher conferences.

Head Start is overseen by the Office of Child and Family Services, which is the regulatory agency. The program must follow whichever requirement is more stringent between the local and Federal government. Head Start works on building blocks to prepare children for education and helps build relationships. Early Head Start consists of 1,380 hours of classroom operations annually and begins in July. Head Start consists of 1,020 hours and begins in September. Early Head Start is very family-centered to promote development of children and help parents/caregivers to reach their own personal goals. They offer family support services and link families to resources in the community.

Because of the services offered to children by Early Head Start, at the end of program year 3, most children perform better than a random control group. There is a foundation of research to support why the program is effective. Head Start consists of family advocates, home visits, family partnership agreements, a parent committee and policy council. Head Start provides leadership development opportunities, parent education and parenting workshops. All Early Head Start students receive health screenings which must take place within 45 days of enrollment. The Creative Curriculum used by Early Head Start is the same as Head Start and the District's PreK 3 and 4 program that builds a foundation for school readiness. The curriculum covers early Math, Literacy, and Science skills, as well as social emotional learning. Language services are available for families that may need it. Head Start has adopted the pyramid model.

The DiFrancesco Center services 3- and 4-year-olds. There are currently six classrooms. They would like to open more classrooms in the future. Want to see every child who applies to get placed. There is a great need for infant and toddler care in this community. A community needs assessment is done every five years which becomes part of program planning.

Dr. Haley O'Stewart thanked everyone for their time. She hopes to come back in the future to give an update.

**Next Meeting: Tuesday, November 29, 2022**