

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

**Tuesday, November 29, 2022, at 6:00 P.M.**  
**Second Floor Conference Room – Administration Building**

**Present:** Makeesha Booker, Dasha Colvin, Stephanie Dolson, Laura Hood, Karen Howard, Denise Jackson, Jodi Lee, Jennifer Mettler, Lauren Piaskowski, Charlotte Robinson, Ebone Rose, Staci Rowe, Raquel Satarian, Marlo Stearns, Dot Swift, Ann Marie Tornabene, Nick Vilardo, Cathy Sullivan and Wendy Tedesco.

**Schools Represented:** Abate, Bloneva Bond Primary School, Cataract, Gaskill, Kalfas, Maple, 79<sup>th</sup> Street, LaSalle Prep, and NFHS

**Schools Missed:** GJ Mann, and Hyde Park

**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**

Mrs. Rowe thanked everyone for attending tonight’s meeting and started the meeting.

**News and Updates**

Mr. Laurrie noted that the District received a new five-year mental health grant. With the funding from this grant, the District will open a family support center, possibly at BBPS. BBPS has a space available, and the school is accessible to families. The family support center will have full time staff, a safety officer for evening hours (open until 9 PM), as well as many resources. The grant will allow students to get more mental health supports. Student mental health needs are growing. The District will give the youth risk behavior survey to students in Grades 7-12 in January. Parents can opt their student out of the survey if they would like. The survey results assist in obtaining grants and in providing needed services.

So far, there have not been any major outbreaks of COVID or RSV, though the nurses are monitoring illnesses. Right now, no need for any change in protocols.

Ten-Week report cards for Grades 9-12 should be in the mail soon. This will be last time NFHS students will get paper report cards. From now on, high school report cards will be accessed through the PowerSchool portal. Parents can request a paper copy through their school if they would like. Will start on-line report card in lower grade levels in the near future. This will help to reduce paper costs.

There were 74 scholar athletes this marking period at NFHS, with four female scholar athletes who participated in two sports. In order to qualify to be a scholar athlete, students must achieve 90 percent or above in each of their classes during the 10-week marking period.

Tomorrow, Ms. Ebone Rose, who is a guidance counselor at NFHS, is taking 12 NFHS students and 12 North Tonawanda High School students to the underground railroad. Participating in activities with students from other districts will help students better understand each other. More integrated activities are planned, as well as a shadow day. Other local school districts have asked to be included in these activities to promote respect amongst students, as well as appreciate differences in each other. The District will discuss the parent code of conduct. Studies show that children develop prejudices early on from parents at home.

The remote learning day on November 8 went well overall, but was not perfect. The District will address the laptop power issues by sending charging chords home with students from school laptop carts. May 17, which is the School Budget voting day, will also be a remote learning day for students. Mrs. Robinson asked if for the next remote day, there could be a dedicated phone technology help line parents can call if they have issues with student laptops/internet access, etc. Mr. Laurrie liked this idea and will look into making arrangements.

The District will hold a referendum vote on Tuesday, January 17 regarding approving the District's ability to borrow money for the purpose of capital projects. Mr. Laurrie would like to keep tax dollars here in Niagara Falls. This day will be a remote learning day for students for safety reasons. As part of the new capital project, a new playground will be installed at Hyde Park Elementary school. Greenhouses will be built at some schools. Air conditioning will be installed at both Prep schools. BBPS and Kalfas will receive new HVAC systems. Secured vestibules will be constructed at all schools and door alarms will be installed to avoid doors being propped open. The capital projects budget will be about \$29 Million. The district will get reimbursed for 98 percent of the capital project costs. The other two percent will be covered by casino funds and possibly new HVAC system rebates. The tax levy will not be raised.

The District purchased speed monitoring signs that will be placed in front of Hyde Park Elementary and Gaskill. Two new safety officers were hired, one for Hyde Park Elementary and another who will be a district-wide floater to go wherever needed. School cancellations due to inclement weather will be announced the night before to give parents time to plan accordingly. Mr. Laurrie appreciates the DPC's support and trust. Please let him know of any needs for the meat raffle. Mr. Laurrie thanked Mrs. Gloria Dolson and Men Standing Strong for their support in the schools.

#### **Niagara County Suicide Prevention Coalition & Community Network of Care Initiatives**

Ms. Myrla Gibbons-Doxy is the Deputy Director of Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services. Ms. Heather Cruz is the Planning Coordinator. They work collaboratively together. The Community Network of Care initiative has been around for eight years. The Network needs to hear parent and children voices so they can be responsive to the needs of the community. Ms. Gibbons-Doxy asked for ideas on how they can help, as we all have a vested interest in the students in the District regarding mental health and substance abuse. They hope to put more preventative efforts in place. Because there is not currently a centralized place to access resources in Niagara County, they are looking at developing an app that can be downloaded onto any device that will make all public service resources easily available. They would like feedback on what is important to include in this app. Want to make sure the app speaks to community needs. Trainings and events will also be posted in the app, as well as information on overall wellness care, suicide prevention, Narcan information, and daily motivational materials. The app will have the ability to send out push notifications. Whatever information is included on the app will also be posted on their webpage and other social media. They will also continue to use paper resources as well for those that may not have access to the internet or know how to use an app. They have a partnership with Heart Love and Soul in which they have a staff member on-site to assist people in accessing services. Heart Love & Soul has some computers available that people can use. The app will need to have features that will speak to various types of ages and populations. Once the app is ready, they will create cards that give instructions on how to download the app.

Mrs. Howard recommended distributing information regarding services through Meals on Wheels. Mrs. Gibbons-Doxy said they currently work with the Office of the Aging as well.

Ms. Tedesco will provide Ms. Gibbons-Doxy with contact information of DPC members, as they would like the opportunity to meet with school PEGs. They do have some grant funds available to help support initiatives and programs. Ms. Gibbons-Doxy's contact information is below. She is very accessible and would be happy to have anyone reach out to her.

Myrla C. Gibbons Doxey, MA LMFT, Deputy Director  
Niagara County Dept. of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services  
5467 Upper Mountain Rd. Suite 200, Lockport, NY 14094  
Phone: (716) 439-7410 Fax: (716) 439-7418

Mr. Vilardo suggested providing administrators in the schools with their contact information and the Help Book so they can share with their social workers and counselors. Mr. Vilardo will touch base with Mr. Laurrie about getting this done. Ms. Robinson offered Niagara County a free vendor table at the upcoming meat raffle if they are interested to help share information with the public.

Ms. Cruz works with the suicide prevention coalition and spearheads the day-to-day operations. Over the last year and a half, the coalition has been reinvigorated due to an escalation in mental health problems as a result of the COVID pandemic. The coalition administered a survey to community members and stakeholders to get a better understanding of what is going on in the community. Once the survey was completed, they formed focus groups made up of people and organizations who were impacted (LGTQB, elderly, etc.). Niagara County is diverse, so the coalition wants to be extremely inclusive and connect people to services. The coalition recently held a virtual Call to Action Day which had over 65 attendees. They discussed short-term priorities and gathered feedback. There is a data collection committee who analyzes the circumstances involved in suicide so they can better provide supports to families who have losses due to suicide and target prevention efforts. Students in the NFCS and other school districts will participate in their youth survey to help gather suicide prevention data. The coalition has a new committee that specializes in training and education which she and Mr. Colpoys co-chair together. The new committee's first goal is to show people what services are available. They hold events to raise awareness such as the coffee sleeve project that provided the telephone number and website address for crisis services. Over 8,500 sleeves were distributed. The student coffee shop at NFHS participated in the event. NFHS students have designed graphics for crisis prevention promotional materials which helps to engage students and provide them with information. This committee is also working to provide training and awareness activities to engage community in conversations about suicide prevention. They recently held a summit. About 45 people participated in the half-day planning session to identify next steps. They hope to get out in the community to do listening tours. If anyone is interested in hosting a session, they would be happy to coordinate it.

When someone contacts crisis services who is experiencing a mental health crisis, it is confidential unless they feel the person is in immediate danger. In these extreme cases, they seek the help of law enforcement. They respond on the scene along with police. Police are trained on how to respond to an individual in crisis, and if there is a weapon involved, they are trained to disarm. The police secure the scene first, then they can engage. If the person needs to go to the hospital, police can secure the person so they can get them to the hospital.

Below is Ms. Cruz's contact information if anyone would like to reach out to her:

Heather Cruz, Planning Coordinator  
Niagara County Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse  
5467 Upper Mountain Road Suite 200, Lockport, New York 14094  
[heather.cruz@niagaracounty.com](mailto:heather.cruz@niagaracounty.com) (716)278-1950

Mr. Colpoys is in the process of updating the Help Book that contains contact information for various Niagara County Community Services. Mr. Colpoys is the Executive Director of the Niagara County Department of Mental Health. The NCDOMH does a lot of community education (schools, business, non-profits). Their most popular presentation is for schools is Mental Health 101, but there are other presentations available that get into deeper topics as well (bullying/cyber bullying). The NCDOMH does a monthly TV show and also a monthly radio show to get the word out about their agency. They also provide hands-on services such as a respite program (free child care for families who have a child with a mental health diagnosis). For the respite program, there are always two staff members that visit the home together for safety and engagement purposes. They bring games and sports equipment to engage with child(ren). The NCDOMH has temporary housing available at Hope House in Lockport for people who need somewhere to stay until they are ready to get back into a regular routine. The NCDOMH also offers a program called Compeer. Compeer matches a volunteer with a person experiencing mental health issues. The goal is to get the person out of the house and do things like going to the movies or a sporting event. The NCDOMH has staff in different locations in Niagara Falls (NFMHC, NF Housing Authority, Trott Access Center) so people can access services. They offer a group respite for children once a week at their main office in Lockport where children enjoy fun activities. This program is very popular, so they are going to offer it more frequently.

### **Men Standing Strong**

Mrs. Gloria Dolson explained that Men Standing Strong formed as a volunteer group in 2019 and, at first, consisted only of men. However, women are also involved in the group now. One goal of MSS is to help African American students to feel more comfortable in school and help them focus on learning. In some cases, African American children do not see themselves represented in adults in the school. The group also wants to help foster a sense of community and bring families together. As part of this goal, they have movie nights once a month at Abate. Someone from the Niagara Falls community (the Mayor, Superintendent, etc.) usually attends the movie night. At the beginning of the school year last year, MSS volunteered at NFHS to offer support. They have also volunteered at Gaskill in the past. Currently, they volunteer in the lunchroom at Abate. Many times, they reach out to parents and families who may need help. Soon they may begin to go into homes to help foster connections between schools and families. Many times, teachers may not know families as well as MSS volunteers do. Sometimes parents may be unaware of what is going on with their child. They are hoping to help bridge these gaps and to keep children on the learning path. It is important that children grow up to understand each other. Social media can be very harmful. MSS volunteers want to send a positive message. Mrs. Dolson is happy to be part of this group and to do what she can to help. Feel free to reach out to MSS if you have a need for their support.

### **AOBs**

Please join our '2023 District Parent Group Meat Raffle' group on the BAND app for groups and communities. Here is the link to the app: <https://band.us/n/a9a285kdG2t72>

### **Next Meeting:**

***Tuesday, December 13, 2022 for Meat Raffle Planning***

***5-7 PM at NFHS in Red/Green Cafeteria***

***Please enter through Main Entrance in front of NFHS***

***The Safety Officer will direct you to the cafeteria.***