

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

**Tuesday, August 22, 2022, at 5:30 P.M.
Second Floor Conference Room – Administration Building**

Present: Stephanie Dolson, Laura Hood, Denise Jackson, Stacey Kok, Jen Mettler, Lauren Piaskowski, Charlotte Robinson, Staci Rowe, Cindy Smith, Raquel Satarian, Marlo Stearns, Dot Swift, Annemarie Tornabene, Kaylee Ulrich, Cathy Sullivan, Nick Vilardo, Richard Carella, Stan Wojton, Jeff Showers, Cheryl Vilardo, and Wendy Tedesco.

Schools Represented: Abate, Cataract, GJ Mann, Hyde Park, Kalfas, Maple, 79th Street, Gaskill Prep, and NFHS

Schools Missed: LaSalle Prep and Niagara Street

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 under the “Parent & Guardian” tab, “District Parent Committee” heading.

Welcome & Introductions

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

Back to School News and Updates

Mr. Mark Laurrie asked everyone to introduce themselves to the group. Mr. Laurrie thanked Ms. Sullivan for her dedication to the District Parent Committee over the years, and for her hard work in organizing the PreK/Kindergarten Jamboree that took place last Tuesday. Approximately 200 families attended the Jamboree. This is Mr. Laurrie’s 7th year as Superintendent, though he has been with the District for 39 years. At 7 PM this evening, Mr. Laurrie and Mr. Carella will host the first District webinar for the school year. District webinars will be done once a month or so during the year to provide updates and information to the public.

COVID-19

At 3:30 PM today, the NYS Department of Health provided COVID-19 guidance for the upcoming school year. The guidance contains a lot of “should do’s”, not “must do’s”. Staff will be reminded that if they are feeling sick, they should stay home and seek care from a doctor if needed. There will be no “test to stay” requirements, quarantining, contact tracing, or required masking. Students or staff are welcome to wear a mask if they wish. If a student starts to get COVID-19 symptoms during the school day, the student should go to the school nurse. The nurse will supply the student with a mask to wear and keep the child in a separate room until the child is picked up by guardian/parent. Overall, the NYSDOH is asking that schools use good universal precautions and common sense. The District has 4,800

COVID-19 test kits. If anyone would like some test kits, they can pick them up at any school. The expiration date on the box is September 2022, but the materials inside the box are marked with an expiration date of February 2023. Testing will no longer be required for unvaccinated staff and it is no longer necessary to report positive test results. Mr. Laurrie is meeting with the Niagara County Health Department tomorrow to discuss whether or not free COVID-19 testing will be offered at various school locations within Niagara County as was provided last year. Students are not required to wear masks on the school bus. However, masks must still be worn on public transportation. No physical distancing will be required. The District already has the appropriate cleaning and disinfecting protocols in place.

School Safety and Security

- The District will be improving security in a number of ways. Some new measures are already in place. Other measures will be implemented in September and in the spring. No exterior doors in the District will be propped open or left unlocked. Safety officers will let voters into the building on voting days. For the general election on November 8 and the School Budget vote on May 17, students will participate in remote learning. This will provide additional practice for remote learning for both students and teachers. Elementary students have a modified schedule on remote learning days. High School and Prep School students will follow their regular schedule.
- The District plans to install weapons detection systems in all eight elementary schools which will cost approximately \$8 Million. Even though the cost is high, Mr. Laurrie and the Board of Education feel it is a necessary measure. Due to Abate's larger student population, two detectors will be installed. Mr. Laurrie is anticipating the detectors should be installed by the end of September.
- Secured vestibules will be constructed in all schools. Visitors are buzzed in through the first door into a secure vestibule area. Items being dropped off can be deposited through a slot in the vestibule area. If a visitor is coming into the building, they will need to bring their driver's license to be run through the Raptor security system that will check the person's record against the sex offender and criminal registry. A visitor badge is printed and provided to the visitor to wear while they are in the building. Once this is done, the visitor will be buzzed through the second set of doors and escorted to where they need to go. The Raptor system is currently being piloted at the Administration Building, Cataract, GJ Mann, 79th Street and Abate. Once the pilot is complete, will obtain feedback from administrators and then move forward with other schools. Raptor will be implemented at the prep schools and high school after the elementary buildings are complete.
- Safety officer staff has increased. Gaskill and LaSalle now have three safety officers each. NFHS has twelve. The District is adding an additional safety officer to Hyde Park School. There may be more in the future.
- Cameras and alarms will be installed on all 340 exterior doors within the District. An alarm will notify building staff if a door is left open beyond a certain period of time. In light of recent events, it is unforgivable to leave any exterior door open or unlocked at a school building. In order to maintain a sense of welcome in spite of the new security measures, Mr. Laurrie has asked that administrators decorate the schools with welcoming colors, signs, student artwork, etc.

Staffing

Ms. Massaro has been working diligently to fill all open positions. Currently, there are only three positions that still need to be filled: one science teacher and two school psychologists. Also, there are existing teachers who may need to take time off for various reasons. Those teachers will need to have substitutes in for them, which is a concern. At a recent job fair run by Ms. Massaro, 84 people signed up for associate positions. Two areas of concern are substitute teachers and bus drivers. Mr. Laurrie met with Niagara Falls Coach Lines on Friday to discuss the needs for the upcoming school year. Altogether, 78 drivers are required to accommodate District transportation needs. However, there are currently only 40 drivers.

NFHS

- In order to help alleviate bussing issues, the start time for NFHS time change was changed to 7:50 AM. Dismissal for NFHS will be 2:30. It is important that NFHS students are dismissed prior to other grade levels, as many high schools students have job, sports, and sibling responsibilities.
- Grade 9 orientation will take place this Saturday from 5:30 to 7:30 PM. Also, only Grade 9 students will be in attendance on the first day of school. Grades 10-12 will start school on September 7. This will allow Grade 9 students to get familiar with walking patterns, busses, etc.
- An alternative school will be created in a small wing of NFHS. Alternative school students will have a different schedule than regular students. There are currently 70 students that have not earned their way back into NFHS and will be on remote learning to start the school year until they are cleared to return to NFHS by administration. There are a few students who will participate in remote learning that have a social/emotional issues in regard to in-person learning.
- Although the graduation rate is still embargoed by NYSED, Mr. Laurie noted that the rate has increased from last year. The goal is to have all students graduate.
- TOSH (Time Out Study Hall) rooms have been added at both Prep schools and NFHS for both security and restorative practice reasons.
- PTech is going well. 106 students are earning college credits beginning in Grade 9. Students will eventually earn an associate's degree along with their high school diploma. Trades and job shadowing is going well. Students will actually be building things this year. Some students will receive an apprenticeship after graduation.

Head Start is up and running. The program for one- and two-year-old children will begin at the Community Education Center located on 60th Street.

The Bloneva Bond renaming ceremony will take place next week. The new playground has been completed and the new sign is in place.

Plans are being made to construct both an intermediate playground and a primary student playground at Hyde Park Elementary School. Faculty parking spaces will be used as the site for the playgrounds, as well as possibly some space on the Michigan Avenue corner of the building. Architects will study the site in the fall and draft a design. Hoping to break ground in April when the weather gets nice.

Mrs. Jackson asked what can be done about the school lunches as the students are not eating them. The students do not like to food being served. Mr. Laurie explained that there are currently supply chain issues with over 32 food items that the District cannot obtain at this time. The list of unavailable items keeps getting longer. Hoping the supply chain will improve soon.

There are 4 initiatives that he will continue to push with teachers/staff/community:

- Increase social emotional learning programs/supports as a result of the pandemic.
- Address diversity/equity/inclusion issues and keep working to understand each other.
- Keep moving forward with academic achievement. District added more math interventions services and Reading Recovery teachers.
- Lessen number of out-of-school suspensions and find ways to keep students in school. The District's drop-out rate is down from 25 percent to 7 percent.

Budget and finances continue to be good. The District has a reserve built up, but must consider what could come up in the long run.

Regarding the Raptor system, Mrs. Rowe asked if the District would consider issuing a special kind of pass for parent group members who are in the schools many times during the week. Mr. Laurie responded that after the pilots have been completed and he receives feedback from administrators, he may consider this as a possibility.

Mr. Laurie mentioned that he looked into installation costs for air conditioning at LPS and GPS. Unfortunately, the cost was about \$20 Million, which is not feasible.

Title I Funding and Parent Engagement

Mr. Richard Carella has posted the District Comprehensive Improvement plan on the District website. The plan lists goals and major initiatives, some of which are a continuation from last year. The Novice Teacher Academy was created to assist teachers who are new to the District through their first five years of teaching. The District expects to hire more new teachers over next two years, as retirements are expected. Student success depends greatly on how well teachers are trained and supported. It is important to build a teacher's capacity to work well with students. This added support will also foster job satisfaction so teachers will want to keep working for the NFCSD.

The District will also further develop social/emotional curriculum and supports as an alternative to suspensions.

Each year, the District is required to provide an overview of ESSA funded programs/grants. Because of the NFCSD's demographics, the District receives about \$5 Million in grant funds each year. There are a lot of rules and regulations that come along with the grant funds. Spending plans must be included in the Title I Consolidated Grant application, which is due to NYSED at the end of August. Title I funds must be shared with non-public schools who have students from NFCSD enrolled at their school. NYSED reviews the grant application thoroughly. There are many different parts of the Consolidated Grant, but the bulk of the funding is for Title I. Title I includes funding for school improvement initiatives, allocations for non-public schools, and assistance to homeless students, etc. This funding is also used for teacher professional development, as well as remedial programs for students and remedial staff salaries.

Some examples of programs under Title I are the PEP Program for Grades K-4, afterschool booster programs, the Extended Summer Learning Program, credit recovery at both high school and prep school levels, interventions for students (extend Reading Recovery and Math AIS). The Math AIS program was piloted in five elementary schools last year. This year, all elementary schools will participate in Math AIS. Through the Math AIS, 65 percent of students met growth targets in NWEA. Teachers who teach Math AIS will be paid out of Title I. There is a huge menu of literacy interventions as well (Corrective Reading, Foundations, Warterford Learning, etc.). There is a wide variety of interventions available, as not all students learn in the same way or have the same struggles. Students are progress monitored religiously so that if one thing isn't working, teachers can try another program for that student. New programs have been added this year such as Orton-Gillingham. The Reading Recovery program now has twelve teachers. These Reading Recovery teachers deliver Tier 3 interventions to four students every cycle. They also coach teachers and go into classrooms to deliver AIS instruction. The District is trying to better equip teachers to address pandemic learning gaps, which are significant in younger grade levels.

Another part of Title I is parent engagement and sharing information with parents regarding schools, programs, curriculum, etc. There is specific funding under Title I for parent committees and events. Each District school receives a parent involvement allocation to use for events at each school. The District must maintain a Parent Engagement Policy which is audited by NYSED. The District's previous Parent Engagement Policy was out of date and not in line with ESSA. Mr. Carella drafted a new policy which is posted on the District's website for parent review along with a survey to obtain parent feedback. The survey will remain open for a few more weeks. Mr. Carella will bring the revised policy before the Board of Education in September for approval.

Mr. Carella asked the committee members to please let him know of any topics they would like to know more about pertaining to the school district. Ms. Robinson suggested a presentation on Science in relation to the NYS

Assessment and the new science standards. Mr. Carella will arrange to have Mrs. McGrath, who is the District STEM Coordinator, to make a presentation to the Committee. Mrs. Kok suggested having some past presenters who came in the past to be invited to return again as there are many new Committee members since their first presentation (Drug Hiding Room, HPV/Roswell).

AOBs

Ms. Robinson has tickets and flyers for meat raffle if anyone would like some. The meat raffle will be held on March 31, 2023.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, September 27, 2022