

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

Minutes

Tuesday, September 24, 2024, at 5:30 P.M.

First Floor Conference Room – Administration Building

Present: Jacqueline Blaber, Makeesha Booker, Stephanie Dolson, Tiffany Garcia, Laura Hood, Karen Howard, Heather Johnson, Anna Lavigueur, Stephanie Lee-Martin, Daraleigh Nowak, Charlotte Robinson, Raquel Satarian, Cindy Smith, Marlo Stearns, Keshia Vincent, Deanna Warren, Amanda West, Nick Vilardo, Richard Carella, Stan Wojton and Wendy Tedesco.

Schools Represented: Abate, Bloneva Bond, Cataract, GJ Mann, Kalfas, Maple, 79th Street, Gaskill Prep, LaSalle Prep, and NFHS

Schools Missed: Hyde Park

Contact Phone Number: Stan Wojton, Central Office Ph: 286-4189 Email: swojton@nfschools.net

Procedural Matters

1. All concerns should be taken to your building principal or School Quality Council before being brought up at the District Parent Committee meeting.
2. The information discussed at the DPC meeting is to be relayed back to your school parent group.
3. 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.
4. The meeting agendas and minutes can be found at www.nfschools.net under the “Parent & Guardian” tab, “District Parent Committee” heading.

Welcome & Introductions

Mr. Wojton welcomed everyone to the meeting. Mr. Wojton explained that he is a Principal on Special Assignment at the Administration Building who will now be working with the District Parent Committee. He thanked Cathy Sullivan for her dedication to this group for many years. He also thanked Mr. Kevin Edwards, District Food Service Administrator, for preparing a wonderful dinner for tonight’s meeting. Mr. Wojton noted that the DPC meetings for the remainder of the year will be held on Wednesdays here in the first floor conference room. Starting with the October 23 meeting, everyone should be able to enter the building through the main entrance, as the secure vestibule work should be completed soon. Mr. Wojton asked that we go around the room so everyone can introduce themselves and share what school(s) they represents. If anyone would like to volunteer to be a facilitator or provide the door prizes for any of this year’s DPC meetings, please sign up on the sheet that is being passed around. Mr. Wojton introduced Mr. Laurrie who will provide a district update.

Back to School News and Updates

Mr. Mark Laurrie welcome everyone back for another school year and thanked the committee for their dedication to the District. Mr. Laurrie welcomed the new members. Mr. Laurrie noted that this group is very valuable in bringing issues for discussion and also relaying presented information back to schools. Each school’s parent group is invaluable to the District and they have accomplished great things. Mr. Laurrie plans to attend all DPC meetings to provide updates and answer any questions. This is Mr. Laurrie’s 41st year of service to the District. Mr. Laurrie’s three children attended District schools. Mr. Laurrie noted that there are many NFCS D graduates who have achieved great things. Mr. Laurrie believes in being transparent and honest. There are two years remaining on Mr. Laurrie’s

contract at Superintendent (this school year and next school year). He intends to remain as Superintendent through the remainder of his contract.

Overall, the opening of schools this year went very well across the District. Some transportation issues still exist, but we are working to continuously improve. Mr. Laurrie visits at least one school every day and is on his second wave of visits. The District is fully staffed this year, though we do need to hire another ENL teacher. There has been an influx of new ENL students in Niagara Falls that do not speak English at all or very little. The District is also growing its programming for children with autism. The District has hired some new special ed teachers and has given those teachers some extra support. There are 8 alternative programs available right now for those students that are not permitted in school buildings due to poor behavior, suspensions, etc., as all students must receive an education. One of the alternative programs is a community school located at the Boys and Girls Club. Also available are one-on-one home teaching and remote learning, until the student is able to return to the school building. Mr. Laurrie visited the Head Start locations yesterday. All is going well.

There were some administrative changes over the summer due to retirements, etc.:

- Mrs. Buchman came to Central Office from Kalfas as an Administrator on Special Assignment
- Mrs. Urban is now the principal at Kalfas
- Mr. Baldassare is now the principal at LPS
- Mr. Briglio was promoted to principal at GJ Mann
- Mr. Murgia was promoted to Mr. Briglio's place as vice principal at Gaskill
- Mr. Ventry received a promotion at NFHS

Unfortunately, a Grade 10 NFHS student passed away last night. This was a devastating and difficult day for NFHS. Counseling is available for both students and staff. Some students asked to be able to gather in a designated classroom in order to grieve together. Mr. Laurrie has been in contact with the student's family, and the school flags are at half-mast in the student's honor. An auto dialer call went out to NFHS parents offering the Crisis Services telephone number if a student has a counseling need beyond the regular school day. Mr. Laurrie asked that everyone keep the student's family in their prayers and thoughts.

Capital projects are in motion. Bullet-proof window film has been installed on all first-floor windows of school buildings. A security program called Zero Eyes will be added to exterior cameras to detect weapons in outside areas of schools such as parking lots and streets. Zero Eyes will immediately notify police and district officials if a weapon is detected. Zero Eyes will be installed on 130 exterior cameras to start. Also, the District is adding more cameras to elementary schools. Secure vestibules are in various stages of completion at all District buildings. The secure vestibule will add another layer of protection in regards to outside people entering the school. Visitors are first buzzed through an initial set of doors by building staff into a secure vestibule that contains a pass-through window if the visitor would just like to drop something off. If the visitor needs to enter the school, they would then be buzzed through a second set of doors by building staff. All of the secure vestibules are different from each other because all buildings are unique. Air conditioning installation work at both Prep schools is progressing. Mr. Laurrie is hoping the A/C will be up and running by May 1.

The new greenhouse being built at BBPS is coming along. The land was inspected by DEC/EPA and no contamination was found. The greenhouse structure itself comes in a kit which should be delivered by November 4. There will be a curriculum implemented to go along with the greenhouse. Other schools will be able to use the greenhouse by reserving a date. New heating and cooling systems were installed at NFHS, Abate and Kalfas. New projectors were installed at NFHS PAC and Amphitheatres, BBPS auditorium and Central Office auditorium. Wireless access points are being installed that produce faster internet speeds.

The District's annual external audit being performed by Drescher & Malecki will be completed by October 17. Hoping for good audit results with no findings.

There has been a lot in the news recently about banning student cell phone use in schools. As cell phones and social media have grown in popularity, it has had an adverse effect on students, both from an educational standpoint and a mental health standpoint. Mr. Laurrie anticipates that the Governor will put the decision in the hands of the Legislature, who in turn, will provide guidelines to school districts to enforce.

NFHS held a sunrise event on the football field that included games, donuts and coffee. Approximately 120 kids attended this positive event. There are other positive projects going on as well. There has been only one fight so far this school year, which is excellent. Administrators are doing a lot of hallway sweeps to make sure students are in class. New signage was put in place at the entrance to NFHS from New Road. Will address lighting for the entrance and parking lots as well.

In closing, Mr. Laurrie extended his appreciation to everyone for the work they do.

Family Resource Center/Family Engagement Updates

Mr. Wojton reviewed two topics/updates that were presented to the DPC last year (Family Resource Center at BBPS and EveryDay Labs). The Family Resource Center's focus is to help remove academic barriers to success. Schools can refer students/families to the FRC. During last year's soft opening in April, May and June, they received 77 referrals. As of this morning, they have received 44 referrals to start the school year. On August 29, FRC provided a professional development session in which District staff received information about the FRC in great detail. FRC has provided families with beds, meals, etc. There are clothing closets at every school to help students throughout District. FRC has expanded community partnerships and can ask those community partners for resources for families as needed. There is a large McKinney-Vento population within our schools (approximately 215 families). FRC has helped to serve this population. The District has obtained some grant funding that has also helped. At the District's Walk the World event, there will be a fundraiser for families in need. Mr. Wojton spoke to a representative from the Teachers Desk which provides resources for teachers and schools. Teachers Desk is donating \$24,000 to FRC. The District is very grateful for their support.

Mr. Wojton also shared further information on EveryDay Labs which is a new attendance communication program the District began using as a pilot last school year. Feedback was gathered from schools that participated in the pilot. EveryDay labs sends text messages, letters, etc., to notify parents/guardians of student chronic absenteeism. Over the summer, schools used data from EveryDay labs in order to be proactive for this school year. This year, EveryDay labs will be used for all grade levels. Information will be provided to parents/guardians about the program through newsletters, mailings, etc. The first attendance text notifications will occur on Tuesday, October 15 and will subsequently be sent out bi-weekly. Mailings will go out on October 19 initially, and then 6 additional times during the school year. Letters will be written in multiple languages to meet the needs of the ENL population. Mr. Wojton asked DPC members to convey this information back to their school. Mr. Wojton is happy to answer any questions or attend school PEG meetings to provide further information.

In an effort to boost communications with the Niagara Falls community beyond using auto calls, calendars, and social media, District representatives/community liaisons from each school attended community events in order to close communications gaps that may still exist and share information. This effort was derailed when the COVID pandemic began. With the pandemic behind us, the school liaisons have begun to reform their family engagement teams. So far, school liaisons have attended two community events, one at Packard Court Community Center, and another at a Walk the Falls Event at Heritage Center. The District has expanded its partnerships with community partners like Independent Health. Starting with one event a month, and will grow from there.

Ms. Tiffany Tarrant, a new DPC member who has an autistic child, relayed information about resources available for children with autism. There are services that provide respite care and transportation services for families, but it is difficult to navigate through the agencies that offer these services. Mrs. Blaber invited Ms. Tarrant to attend the next SEPTA committee meeting to share this information. SEPTA currently has 66 members, including parents who have students in out-of-district placements. Mr. Vilaro attends the SEPTA meetings as well. Many families that have children with special needs struggle with financial issues and other related hardships. There are agencies that can help.

In closing, Mr. Wojton noted that the rest of the DPC meetings going forward will take place on Wednesdays in the first floor conference room. The dates are: October 23, November 20, January 22, February 26, March 26 and May 28. There are no meetings in December or April.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, October 23, 2024 in First Floor Conference Room