

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

Wednesday, September 24, 2025, at 5:30 P.M.
First Floor Conference Room – Administration Building

Present: Makeesha Booker, Tammy Capatosto, Andrea Douglas, Evangline Filsinger, Laura Hood, Heather Johnson, Anna Lavigueur, Stephanie Lee-Martin, Dara Nowak, Lauren Piaskowski, Adell Rivera, Charlotte Robinson, Cindy Smith, Marlo Stearns, Nick Vilardo, Mark Laurrie, Jolene Nearhood, Rick Carella, Cheryl Vilardo, Stan Wojton and Wendy Tedesco.

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

Schools Missed: Kalfas

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.

Sleep in Heavenly Peace

Mr. Kevin Burgess from the Family Resource Center (FRC) spoke about a new project called “Sleep in Heavenly Peace”. There was a press conference at Bond today launching the project. FRC has been operating since March of 2024 and is housed at Bond. One of their goals is to alleviate any barriers that may prevent a student from attending school. FRC helps families with whatever they may need:

- Resources for clothing (there are also clothes closets in each school for students). They work closely with Community Missions as well.
- Securing health insurance through Fidelis and NFMCC.
- Link families to mental health/substance abuse services and food pantries. There is a community food pantry through FeedMore WNY and Community Missions at NFHS every other Friday, with pick up at Door #3 (requires registration through QR code).
- FRC staff will help with applications and link families to care management (NFMCC and New Directions).

The FRC found that many families were in need of beds for their children. FRC met with Sleep in Heavenly Peace Buffalo (SHP) (non-profit that builds beds and delivers them to families in need). Criteria to be eligible to receive a bed from SHP:

- no bed at all
- sharing a bed with a sibling or parent

- sleeping on the couch, floor, etc.
- Ages 3-17
- No bed bugs in the home (need letter from landlord if had them in the past)
- living in a permanent housing (can be put on wait list if currently homeless or moving to a new location)

Once you have received a bed from SHP, you are not eligible again (unless there was a fire in the home or other extreme circumstances). It is meant to be a one-time service. If interested in receiving a bed, must fill out an application located in SHP portal. All candidates are vetted.

If approved to receive a bed, SHP volunteers will deliver the bed to the home and install it. The bed comes along with linens, a comforter, pillow, and a mattress pad. Lowe's supplies SHP with materials to construct the beds at cost. The materials to build one bed are valued at \$250, plus the linens brings it to a \$300 value. SHP gladly accepts donations of brand new, unused twin-size linens. There are collection bins currently at Bloneva Bond and Hyde Park. The bins will be moved around to different schools. If a school is having a special community event, let Mr. Burgess know and he will arrange to send a bin. If anyone would like to donate linens, they can also be dropped off to Mr. Burgess at the FRC located at Bloneva Bond. Monetary donations are also accepted through QR code.

Volunteers are needed to deliver and assemble the beds for the Niagara Falls SHP operation. The bed building takes place at Eastern Hills Mall. On-site training is provided. They are in need mostly of volunteers for delivery/home assembly. So far, have delivered 19 beds in Niagara Falls. There are 94 bed requests in the queue. Prioritizing students who attend NFCSD schools.

Master Kechens

Mr. Johnny Mallard is the operator of the Master Kechens Martial Arts studio. Mr. Mallard is from Niagara Falls and graduated from Niagara Falls High School. Master Kechens has been a part of the Niagara Falls community for over 36 years. Along with the Niagara Falls location in the City Market, they also have their main location in Buffalo. Master Kechens offers some special promotions for students and teachers. Working with a few schools over the past couple years. Master Kechens helps kids learn how to deal with bullying, as well as self-confidence, respect and discipline. They often work closely with school districts as a community partner. This year, Master Kechens is offering anti-bullying and goal setting workshops in order to help students to be successful in and out of school. Their focus is on the whole child. They are currently working with Bond and Abate, and most recently, 79th Street. Please reach out to them at (716) 215-6232 if your school is interested in any of their programs or services.

Say Yes Community Schools

Mr. Wojton introduced Ms. Misty Duncan from Say Yes. Say Yes focusses on 4 pillars: 1) workforce/apprenticeship for high school students; 2) boys and men of color (mentoring that supports students); 3) breaking barriers program (will adapt to what we need); and 4) scholarship/endowment piece. The endowment goal is \$20 Million. Under the Say Yes endowment, all college costs not paid for by other financial assistance sources would be covered for a student to attend any SUNY/CUNY college or one of 100 other universities (Niagara University included). This would include books, transportation, etc. So far, have raised almost \$2 Million. Will provide updates during the course of the year.

Ms. Duncan spoke to the Committee about the upcoming Saturday Academies that will be taking place soon at Cataract, Bond, Abate, and Gaskill (see flier attached). Please share this information with anyone who may be interested in attending. Ms. Duncan lives in Niagara Falls and has children that attend 79th Street School. The Say Yes program is near and dear to her heart. The purpose of Saturday Academies is to bring the community and schools together. The Saturday Academies provide a resource for families to get together and have fun. Each Saturday Academy has a theme. For example, the first Saturday's theme is farm to school.

All families are welcome. Everyone will need to register upon arrival and will receive a wrist band. Adults will need to bring a valid driver's license to be run through the Raptor visitor system. All food and activities are free, there is no costs to families to participate. The day starts off with breakfast. After breakfast, activities will begin (line dancing, miniature ponies, educational games, sensory bins, escape room). Lunch is provided at 11:30. Also, other community groups and organizations will be in attendance to provide information and will have giveaways.

The first Saturday Academy is taking place on October 4 at Cataract, but is for all students and families in the District. Will be a lot of fun. Special thanks to Mrs. Nearhood who assisted Ms. Duncan in working out the logistics. If anyone has any feedback or suggestions, please share them with Mrs. Nearhood, who will pass onto Ms. Duncan. Ms. Duncan attended all district school open houses to pass out fliers and provide information. Families are encouraged to attend as many Saturday Academies as you would like, no two will be the same. Anyone under age of 14 is required to be accompanied by an adult. There will be three safety officers and one SRO present at each Saturday Academy.

Opening of Schools/District Update

Mr. Laurrie welcomed everyone back. 42 years ago today, Mr. Laurrie starting working for the NFCSO at Gaskill as a classroom aide. This will be his last year, as he will be retiring as of June 30. Mr. Laurrie will continue to work hard every day until his retirement and appreciates the time he has spent working for the District. The Board of Education will start the process of selecting a new superintendent soon.

So far, the Smart device ban has been going well. Administrators and students are doing a great job. Parents have been respectful. Elementary and preps have been excellent, not too many violations at NFHS. Hallways and cafeterias have been much louder, in a good way.

The District is currently undergoing 3 audits: external audit that looks at District's financials; internal audit to look at the District's internal processes; and the regular auditing of internal claims. Mr. Laurrie is confident that the audit will go well. The District continues to grow reserves. Mr. Laurrie feels that the school budget will begin to get tighter during the next few years due to the fact that there will be a 7 percent cut in Federal funding. The reserves the District has built up will be needed to keep all programming for students.

Student bus transportation continues to be an issue this school year. Niagara Falls Coach Lines still is experiencing a bus driver shortage. Adjustments are being made, and it is starting to improve. Niagara Falls Coach Lines currently has only 40 drivers. On any given day, there are some call-ins that make it even more difficult. The District is required to have busses strictly dedicated to students with seizure disorder, plus some for students with special needs. In order to meet those needs, it takes up about 19 busses. Mr. Laurrie decided to try something new and not route NFHS students for dismissal as he felt it would be less confusing. Many students end up changing their drop off locations for various reasons each day. However, it caused more confusion. Also, parents were not able to use the bus app for tracking their child's bus. Mr. Laurrie apologized for any confusion.

Had a good start to the school year overall. There are currently 53 students in the building trades program, and an additional teacher had to be hired. Mr. Laurrie agreed to allow students to work on rebuilding rooms at the NAAC as part of their building trades class. Also, considering making arrangements for student to maintain the grounds for 9 holes on the Hyde Park golf course to help teach students learn about horticulture and landscaping.

The portrait of a graduate is ever-changing. Graduation rate is 87%, so still room for improvement. The District opened about 5 more classrooms for autistic children.

Mr. Laurrie is excited about SayYes program. Hoping that NFHS graduates will get some tuition relief in the next year or so.

Mr. Laurrie thanked everyone for attending tonight's meeting and for continuing to support the District.

AOBs

Mr. Wojton mentioned that a new layer of safety has been added since last school year called Zero Eyes. Zero Eyes works in conjunction with some of the District's existing security cameras to identify any potential weapons being carried by a person coming from the parking lot. If a weapon is detected, the system will immediately send a notification to the Zero Eyes security center to determine if a threat. Then, a notification is sent to designated school staff. If needed, the school then initiates a lockdown sequence. Every second counts. The NF Police Department is also notified immediately.

When a visitor enters the building, they are first buzzed into a secure vestibule. They then communicate with school office staff to determine purpose of visit. If the visitor is dropping something off, they will use the passthrough window in the secure vestibule. If the visitor needs to enter the building, they are accompanied by a safety officer and must walk through Evolv scanner and have their driver's license scanned by Raptor system. Raptor will notify the safety officer if there is a sex offender alert. Every school now has a safety officer on-site to manage Evolv system.

The District also added nuisance alarms to all exterior doors. Mr. DalPorto worked with building principals to identify doors as primary door, no entry door, delivery door, etc. System makes a notification if a door is opened for too long. Mr. DalPorto will make one round of adjustments after speaking with principals and discussing any changes to length of alarm/door designation.

Next meeting Wednesday, October 22, 2025
