

ANGLOPHONE SOUTH SCHOOL DISTRICT (ASD-S)
DISTRICT EDUCATION COUNCIL
Minutes of Meeting – April 14, 2021

The District Education Council (DEC) for Anglophone South School District (ASD-S) met virtually on Wednesday, April 14, 2021. The following Council members and staff were in attendance:

Council Members:

Rob Fowler, Chair; Roger Nesbitt, Vice Chair; Shelly Merrill-MacKillop, Jonathan Barry, Dan O'Connor, Wayne Spires, Justin Tinker, Heather Gillis, Richard Malone, Bernie Regenbogen, Kristen Murphy

Regrets: Lory-Ann MacAskill

ASD-S Staff:

Zoë Watson, Superintendent; Gary Hall, Director of Curriculum & Instruction, Jessica Hanlon, Director of Communication, Peter Smith, Director of Education Support Services, John MacDonald, Director Finance & Administration, Susan Moffatt, Director of Human Resources, Allan Davis, Director of Schools, Hampton Education Centre, Melissa Savoie, Director of Schools, Saint John Education Centre, Derek O'Brien, Director of Schools, St. Stephen Education Centre, Lissa McNaughton-Dickie, Director of Early Childhood, Marc Godin, Alignment Champion; and Clare Murphy, Recording Secretary.

1. Call to Order/Welcome/Regrets

Mr. Fowler, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:03 pm. He advised that Lory-Ann MacAskill was unable to attend tonight's meeting.

2. Approvals

2.1 Approval of the Agenda

Mr. Fowler referred to the Agenda for the meeting and asked that if there were no questions or concerns that a motion be put forward to approve. Mr. Nesbitt moved that the Agenda be approved as presented. Seconded by Ms. Murphy. Motion carried.

2.2 Approval of Minutes

Mr. Fowler referred to the Minutes of the March 10, 2021 meeting and asked if there were no questions or concerns that a motion be put forward to approve. There being no questions or concerns, Mr. Nesbitt moved that the Minutes be approved as presented. Seconded by Ms. Gillis. Motion carried.

3. Member's Notebook

Mr. O'Connor commented that he likes the new School Improvement model being implemented – a short 1 pager - compared to the old pages and pages of a spreadsheet. He forwarded one that Greg Norton and his team at Loch Lomond School put together as a great example.

He congratulated Erika Brown and her team at Forest Hills for their work in addressing gaps in literacy in middle school students. Through early benchmarking in the fall, they noticed a greater number of students (than in previous years) who were not reading at grade level, likely due to COVID disruptions. Those students participated in precision reading from the start of November until the end of March. All students showed improvement, with 75% now working at grade level. Also, the middle school students participated in Financial Literacy Month and some submitted their projects to a National Competition; we have 5 students in the top 30 in all of Canada.

He thanked Seaside Park PSSC for their letter to Council regarding their concerns for the safety of our walkers.

Ms. Gillis commented that numbers participating in the breakfast program at Champlain Heights are increasing during COVID; pre-pandemic 75 participated, and now there are 200. The need is great and the school is applying for funding from Breakfast for Learning. She noted that the school is hosting a virtual storybook STEM Literacy Night on April 29. At Bayside Middle School they are busy planning field trips, and at St. Malachy's and Saint John High School they are working on graduation plans.

Mr. Barry expressed his appreciation to the PSSC at Rothesay High School for providing a staff lunch and treats along with some draws and other fun things. The staff were super appreciative and it was an excellent show of support for the staff.

Mr. Fowler commented that many schools run breakfast programs and many Saint John students depend on them. He noted that high school students run food banks for students. Schools have washing machines available to clean clothes, they send food home on weekends where needed, and needs have increased with COVID.

Mrs. Watson noted that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has been discussing breakfast programs with the District. They conducted a survey of what schools have, what funds they have available to them, and did they have enough to complete the year. She advised that the District has a budget line for this and that we will provide funds required to complete this year. She wanted to thank community partners, parents, students and staff who all work so hard to provide this needed service.

4. Presentations

4.1 ENDS #3 – Ensure all members of the school community are welcomed, respected, accepted and supported and to address heterosexism and discrimination. Mr. Peter Smith, Director of Educational Support Services was in attendance to update Council on the goal of ensuring all members of the school community are welcomed, respected, accepted and supported addressing heterosexism and discrimination. The monitoring report and additional supporting documents were posted with Council's meeting materials for review and form part of these Minutes.

Mr. Smith then provided Council with an overview of strategy 3.1.1 – to create a committee of district and school leaders to build and implement, in consultation with community members, a strategic plan to promote diversity and address heterosexism and discrimination in ASD-S culture. He noted that the status of this strategy is complete.

He identified the members of the newly formed ASD-S LGBTQ+ who met for the first time in February, and will meet again before the end of the school year; their purpose (to ensure a diversity of voices inform the District Plan) and the top three recommendations from their meeting, which include: a review of data and policies to identify challenges; review and promote accessible places in schools for members of the LGBTQ+ community and to investigate ways to ensure the psychological safety of staff who are members of the LGBTQ+ community to choose to be themselves in their workplace.

He spoke about strategy 3.1.2 – to support curriculum and increase resources that reflect diversity and anti-racism by creating an advisory committee to ensure a diversity of voices that reflect our larger community and inform our district anti-racism plans. The ASD-S Anti-racism Advisory Committee met in March and will meet again before the end of the school year. He identified the members of the newly formed committee, which he Chairs. He commented that it was clear from all members of the committee that racism exists both on a systemic level and a cultural level within our schools and school staff are not always empowered to recognize and respond to this; two recommendations from the committee were to: investigate how other jurisdictions are taking antiracist action, and to develop a district policy which sets expectations for staff and protections for students who are black, indigenous and people of colour that is similar to the policy which currently sets expectations and protections for students who are members of the LGBTQ+. He noted that the status of this strategy is complete.

Mr. Fowler thanked the District staff for their informative presentations and called for a motion to approve the monitoring report for ENDS #3. Mr. Nesbitt moved that the monitoring report for ENDS #3 be approved as presented. Seconded by Ms. Murphy. Motion carried.

5. Business Arising from the Minutes

5.1 Capital Projects & 2022 Summer Improvement Projects

Mrs. Watson noted that staff reviewed the Capital Projects and Summer Improvement Projects list in depth at the March meeting and allowed time for Council to review over the past month. She advised that a motion would be required at this meeting.

Mr. Fowler asked that if there were no questions or concerns, that a motion be put forward to approve the 2022 Summer Improvements Project list as presented. Mr. Spires moved that the list be approved as presented. Seconded by Mr. Nesbitt, motion carried.

Mr. Fowler then reviewed the major capital projects list as presented, noting that the list remains unchanged from last year as follows:

- Recommendation for new K–8 school to replace St. John the Baptist / King Edward School and Prince Charles School as per 409 study completed 2017–2018.
- Recommendation for new K–5 school to replace Centennial School and Hazen-White/St. Francis School as per 409 study completed 2017–2018.
- Recommendation for Major Mid-Life Upgrade for Saint John High School to proceed.
- Recommendation for either expansion onto M. Gerald Teed School or replacement of M. Gerald Teed School to provide full K-5 school as per 409 study completed 2018-2019.
- Recommendation for Mid-Life upgrade for Princess Elizabeth School.
- Recommendation for new K–5 school to replace Grand Bay Primary and Inglewood.

Mr. Fowler then asked that if there were no questions or concerns, that a motion be put forward to approve the Major Capital Projects list as presented. Mr. Nesbitt moved that the list be approved as presented. Seconded by Ms. Gillis, motion carried.

5.2 Superintendent Evaluation

Mr. Tinker advised that the subcommittee met last month and advises that they reached the unanimous conclusion that Mrs. Watson has exceeded expectations of reasonable performance and made the following recommendations, to be approved as one motion:

Mr. Tinker moved that the District Education Council of Anglophone South School District express sincere thanks and appreciation and strongly commend Mrs. Watson for her very dedicated work this past year on behalf of all employees, students and parents.

Mr. Tinker moved that as a result of her administration of the District this year, Mrs. Watson's performance is rated as Exceeds Most Expectations with respect to policy compliance.

Mr. Tinker moved that as a result of her successful administration of Anglophone South District this year, Mrs. Watson would be eligible for a four step re-earnable increment if salaries were not frozen at present levels.

There being no questions or concerns, motion was then seconded by Mr. Spires. Motion carried.

Mr. Fowler expressed his thanks and congratulations to Mrs. Watson on a phenomenal job over the past year. From measles to COVID, it has been an extremely challenging year.

6. New Business

6.1 Executive Limitations #8, 9 & 11

Mr. Fowler advised that Executive Limitations policies #8 (Staff Compensation); #9 (Treatment of Media, Public, Stakeholders & Staff) and #11 (Property Management) were all posted with Council's meeting materials for review. He asked that if there were no questions or concerns, that a motion be put forth to approve all three monitoring reports in one motion.

Mrs. Watson briefly reviewed each policy highlighting challenges and/or any changes from the previous year.

There being no questions or concerns, Mr. Nesbitt moved to approve the Executive Limitation policies #8, 9 & 11 as presented. Seconded by Mr. Barry. Motion carried.

6.2 Motion to Declare Morna Heights Surplus

Mr. Fowler advised that this was a housekeeping item that needed to be addressed. Morna Heights School closed on June 30, 2020 but Council delayed a motion to declare surplus as there had been an indication that the school might be required for space during the COVID pandemic. It was not used, and now must be declared surplus.

There being no questions or concerns, Mr. Nesbitt moved that Morna Heights School and property be declared surplus to the needs of the District. Seconded by Ms. Murphy. Motion carried.

6.3 District Improvement Plan 2021-2022

Mrs. Watson advised that the District Improvement Plan pre-pandemic had seven goals which were paired down to four in a one year transitional plan for 2020-2021. This was done in order to address needs created by the pandemic, including the use of technology; recovery phases and the changes required during each; professional learning, mental health and social emotional learning, to name a few. Mrs. Watson asked if there was agreement to develop another one year plan with some of the strategies carrying over, and the addition of new ones. Comment was made that with a new DEC coming on board it might be difficult to develop a longer term plan at this time, and that next year a plan will also look different as we recover. Council was in agreement with staff preparing a plan for 2021-2022.

7. Information Items

7.1 Superintendent Report and Update

Mrs. Watson advised that her report had been posted with Council's meeting materials for their review. She thanked the Directors who were attending on line tonight.

She highlighted the following from her report: a COVID-19 outbreak at Loch Lomond School; in-person visits to schools by Occupational Health & Safety Coordinator, Clare Tooley, to review operational plans; high school preparations for the return of students, including busing adjustments; graduation plans; community use of schools opening up; professional learning of 39 teachers in Asynchronous EAL Professional Learning; Mental Health First Aid training; heritage fairs; district communications and media; virtual parent teacher day; provincial Student Perception Surveys; Loran Scholarship Award winner, Younseo Heo, from Saint John High School; Healthy Learners Nurse Alberta Stanton's departure to Public Health.

7.2 Chair's Report and Update

Mr. Fowler noted an article that appeared recently in the Telegraph Journal, written by Paul Bennett, "Education governance needs serious overhaul", and wanted to read a few comments into the record:

First, Mr. Bennett claims that one of the most significant contributors to lagging student performance is policy governance - or DEC's. Where is the evidence of this? Mr. Bennett offers none.

DECs by their very definition under policy governance, do not get involved in the Operations of the District. We provide a broad framework through policies we develop – both Ends Policies and Executive Limitations Policies – that guide the Superintendent in the development of planning the educational experience for our children. We

monitor the Superintendents progress towards the goals that we set and provide an annual review and report that summarizes the Superintendents performance, which is the defacto performance of the District as well.

Let's be frank – we are not the old School Board. We do not get involved in hiring, planning of bus routes, placement of staff, procurement of supplies, or any other operational component of the schools. While DEC's are sometimes made up of retired teachers and administrators who do understand education, we are not educational experts and have no business trying to insert ourselves into the classroom – so we don't.

We do oversee the budget by approving or making adjustments to the annual budget prepared by our Finance staff. The global dollar amount is set by EECD, and line item allocations are determined by the Superintendent and Finance staff based on CBA staffing levels and a keen inside knowledge of where other operational dollars are required. Several times over the past number of years, the DEC has refused to approve the budget based on severe underfunding of Educational Assistants, a chronic problem. To be clear, if a child needs an EA, the District does not have the luxury of saying, sorry we're overbudget on EAs, your child will have to wait for next year. Staff have to find the money from other line items in the budget – repairs and maintenance for example. This is a constant struggle and has been long before I joined the DEC in 2005. If there is no DEC, who will take on that challenge and work with EECD to address the issue?

DECs, and more specifically, the Council of DEC Chairs, (both Anglophone and Francophone) are required to meet with the Minister 3 times per year. At those meetings, and at other meetings throughout the year with EECD, we talk about many issues including governance reforms we what we would like to see. We are more than open and more than willing to talk about reforms - but we need to be at the table as the body living the role. We have much to offer! Mr. Bennett alluded to a Facebook post by the former Attorney General announcing the dismantling of DEC's – imagine our surprise when we had no indication from the Minister of Education that dismantling was the plan. In essence, it was not her place to make such an announcement, it should have come from the Minister. The justification was that getting rid of DEC's will provide more local control and not top down control. As DEC's we deal constantly with EECD on issues affecting education and provide an important link between parents, the community, PSSCs, local school administration and staff, District Staff and community partners to the Minister and staff at EECD. In the absence of DEC's, will schools organize themselves to approach the Minister about budget shortfalls, understaffing and the sustainability of schools?

One of the duties of the DEC is to evaluate the sustainability of schools and it attracts the most attention – usually negative. Nobody likes to talk about their community school potentially closing. I have been involved in more policy 409 consultations than I care to count, and I can assure you no DEC member enjoys the process. I've known members who have lost sleep over these consultations and suffered severe anxiety. If you look at the track record of all 409 consultations in both sectors, anglophone and francophone, you will see that many do not result in a closure recommendation – DEC members take the role seriously.

One of the main problems with the process is not the consultation parameters themselves but that most Ministers, and certainly the local MLA, are reluctant to close a school. Not until Minister Serge Rousselle determined that as the local governing body the DEC was best suited to decide on a closure, after a thorough and accurate review. His position was that as long as we followed the process completely, he would not intervene. Most Ministers since have adopted the same policy. Minister Rousselle's stance started a trend of empowering DEC's to do the job we were set up to do. We need more empowerment to make local decisions unique to our community.

Mr. Bennett in his article talks about research done by UNB's Larry Bezeau who found that eliminating elected Boards saved little or no money, and also removed decision making even further from parents and the local community. This is the essence of what DEC's are talking about.

DEC members who have quit or resigned in frustration do so because they want to be heavily involved in day-to-day decisions because they aren't able to see immediate results of their policy work. Long term policies take time. This causes DEC members to creep into Operations and it's a constant battle to respect that line.

Under Policy Governance we have managed to make several significant policy strides that will have long term positive impacts for our students and staff. It was DEC's and DEC Chairs supporting the work of the Pride in

Education Group, and advocating with every Minister in the last 12 plus years, that resulted in Minister Cardy finally signing off on a provincial Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity policy (Policy 713) last fall.

It was the Anglophone South DEC that met at one of our very first meetings as an amalgamated group that made Mental Health a priority for our District. We charged our Superintendent to develop programs and resources to reflect the community's desire that the mental health of our students and staff needed to be a very high priority. I am in awe of the work staff has done in both of these areas. Following our lead, ASD-East, ASD-North and ASD-West then followed suit.

In summary – DEC's are very willing to talk about Governance reform and have been doing so consistently over the years to some degree of success. The department is now undertaking a review, but I have serious concerns given that the Minister seems to have already made up his mind based on statements made to Mr. Bennett for his article.

Finally – we have always had difficulty attracting candidates to run for a DEC position (with the exception of this year) and often have seats acclaimed or appointed after the election. I would argue that this is an issue for other boards and several smaller municipalities as well. The Council of DEC Chairs has taken on the role of trying to drive up interest to offer for a seat on the DEC.

In closing - instead of using the perceived apathy as an excuse to dismantle DEC's, the department should look at helping to clarify and expand the role, and ultimately make us an even stronger community voice.

Mr. Fowler expressed his best wishes to all those who were running for Council in the May 10 election and congratulated all who have been acclaimed.

Mr. Fowler thanked all staff who attended tonight's meeting in person and on line for their time.

7.3 Correspondence

None, all had been posted.

8. Adjournment

Mr. Fowler thanked all who attended this evening's Council meeting and reminded Council the next meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 12, 2021 beginning at 7:00 p.m. Council may choose to attend in person or virtually.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rob Fowler, Chair

Clare Murphy, Recording Secretary