

Upper Grand District School Board

Program Committee

Minutes

Tuesday, January 4, 2022

The Program Committee of Upper Grand District School Board met virtually on Tuesday, January 4, 2022, commencing at 7:00 p.m.

The Chairperson Trustee Lustgarten Evoy presided, and the following Trustees were present: Bailey, Busuttil, Campbell, Edwards, Foley, MacNeil, Ross, and Topping, together with student Trustees Emilie Hill and Vikasni Kuganesan. Also in attendance were Director of Education Sovran, Executive Superintendent McDonald, and Superintendents Hamilton, Heaslip, Lindsay, McCutcheon, Taha and Zen.

Confirmation of Agenda

Trustee Busuttil requested that the agenda be amended to add a new item # 4, A presentation on return to school by staff.

Trustee Busuttil moved that the agenda be confirmed as amended.

The motion carried.

Declarations of Conflict of Interest

There were no conflicts of interest.

Approval of Minutes

Trustee Topping moved that the minutes of the meeting held on November 2, 2021 be approved as printed.

The motion carried.

School Re-Opening Update

Director Sovran presented a verbal report on school re-opening updates and provided details in three sections: historical context, the January 3rd Provincial announcement, and planning for return to in-person learning.

Due to the continued global pandemic, schools were once again asked to shift to remote learning. Director Sovran took a moment to acknowledge and give thanks to the students for persevering, to the families who have continued to support and adapt, and to all the amazing staff at Upper Grand DSB for being ready to shift and adapt.

Historical context was provided highlighting the provincial pivot to full remote learning from March 2020 to June 2020, in-person learning with layered measures of prevention from September 2020 to December 2020, and the Provincial pivot to full remote learning upon the return from December break from January 2021 to June 2021. From September 2021 to December 2021 there were a number of measures Upper Grand DSB had taken, in many cases which were over and above the requirements provided by the Ministry of Education, such as vaccination disclosure for staff and visitors, stand-alone HEPA filter units for all elementary school classrooms, classroom airflow measures, optional staff N95 respirator protocol, enhancements to school ventilation systems, mentally healthy classrooms, and rapid antigen test (RAT) kits for students and staff.

On January 3, 2022, the Ministry of Education announced January 3rd and 4th would be non-instructional days for all students and that all students across the province would once again pivot to full remote learning starting on January 5, 2022. In the announcement there were also changes to contact tracing and case counts, changes to daily screening and symptom flow charts, and emergency childcare.

Return to in-person would begin on January 17, 2022 unless otherwise directed by the province or local public health. Director Sovran highlighted several enhancements to student/staff safety and supports which included ventilation and stand alone HEPA units, masks, case counts proxy pilot, daily screening verification in elementary and secondary schools, raising awareness of vaccination opportunities, transportation, mental health and well-being supports and resources, pause on extra-curriculars and community use, encouraging outdoor learning time, implementing RAT and take home PCR testing as supported by the province, and supports for continuity of learning.

Questions after the presentation were answered by staff. Trustees concerns and questions were regarding the number of masks supplied to the students, allocated HEPA units from the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, changes to the mask exemption protocol, whether the counts proxy pilot would be publicly shared, the cost of rapid antigen testing (RAT) for asymptomatic testing, daily screening verification at home and in schools and the implications of an incomplete screening, and the availability of PCR tests in schools.

Trustee Busuttil placed a motion that, the Chair send a letter to add Upper Grand DSB's voice to the call to immediately add COVID-19 to the list of designated diseases in Ontario Regulation 261/13 Immunization of School Pupils Act. Furthermore, to clearly state that in order to support Upper Grand DSB's safe return to school efforts, that the government immediately procure rapid antigen tests (RAT) for students and staff to voluntarily conduct regular asymptomatic screening at least twice a week and that the Ministry of Health develop a test-to-stay/return asymptomatic screening process, given that transmission occurs prior to the onset of symptoms.

Trustee MacNeil asked if a special meeting is needed in order to ratify this motion, or if the Board will wait until the end of the month to write this letter.

Trustee Busuttil shared the role of the chairperson does not require a motion of the Board to write a letter and that a letter can be written with the intent expressed by the Board. Trustee Busuttil suggested the letter be written as soon as possible.

Trustee Ross asked if anyone has ever heard a reason as to why COVID-19 has not yet been added to the list of designated diseases on the Ontario Regulation 261/13 Immunization of School Pupils Act. She would like to know if there is a medical reason why it would not be effective in the act.

Trustee MacNeil shared that when this topic was brought up in the meetings with the Minister of Education previously, the answer was always that COVID-19 could not be included until all students, of all ages, could be vaccinated.

Trustees expressed no concerns in having Trustee Busuttil, in the role of Board Chair, to write the letter on the Board's behalf.

Recommendation # 1

Trustee Ross moved that the verbal school re-opening update be received, with thanks.

The motion carried.

Report from Student Trustees

Student Trustees Vikasni Kuganesan and Emilie Hill reported that the student senate meetings were held virtually in November and December. Along with both student

trustees, 14 students representing 9 of the 12 secondary schools attended the November meeting. The student senate welcomed Director Peter Sovran and Superintendent of Education Pat Hamilton who spoke about the upcoming survey for students regarding the possible return to semesters in early February, and also welcomed Equity and Inclusion Lead Jessica Rowden who shared information about the Board's continuing work on equity, diversity and inclusion. At the December meeting, there were a total of 13 student senators representing 8 of the 12 secondary schools. Once again, the students had the pleasure of welcoming Director of Education Peter Sovran who commemorated a moment to former Director Martha Rogers and also thanked the senators and their represented schools for their input regarding the quad-semester survey. Board Chair Linda Busuttil also joined the meeting and introduced herself and her background and shared that she was eager to help elevate the student voice. The student trustees had let senators know that they decided to postpone the celebration booklet due to various circumstances within the board and introduced the topic of the student trustee elections to the senators and shared the election would be taking place this February. Student trustees shared they received input from not just senators but many Upper Grand DSB students expressing their concerns about the abrupt pivot to online/remote learning, and that many students are worried for their well-being and education due to this drastic change.

At the end of their report, the student trustees asked questions of clarification regarding mask accessibility and mental health supports for students.

Recommendation # 2

Trustee Bailey moved that the verbal update from Student Trustees be received, with thanks.

The motion carried.

Mental Health Update

Mental Health and Addictions Lead Jenny Marino shared that at this time, returning to remote learning with the new variant and further uncertainty, the Upper Grand DSB Wellness Works theme for the month of January is empathy. Ms. Marino provided an overview on Mental Health Updates, which included: current supports during Remote; an update on Parent Webinar Series; Data Collection for Planning; Child and Youth Counselors (CYC) Best Practice Guidelines; Educational Assistant PD Day: Mental Health; and Addiction Education and Prevention.

Staff are being reminded of the supports, information, and resources that have been, and continue to be, easily accessible and available through the educator website for student mental health and well-being which focus on returning students to their remote classrooms in a welcoming, inclusive and safe space.

An update on the Parent Webinar Series was shared. This is a series of webinars to support parents/caregivers/elders and guardians in supporting their children and youth.

Ms. Marino shared an important program department collaborative initiative. This project involved collecting data on students served to date, exploring current areas of needs, and developing a strategic and collaborative plan for reducing pressure areas while continuing to support arising needs.

CYC Best Practice Guidelines was created via committee over five years ago and this document reviewed all aspects of the CYC role expectations in case management. This document was reviewed in 2019, but with the increase in needs since that time, the committee will reconvene in the month of January to look more closely at the guidelines for any further revisions, additions and recommendations to ensure these essential supports are meeting the needs of the students, staff, and administrators.

Ms. Marino shared work happening around the professional development day for the Educational Assistants (EA) who are important players in the support of mental health and well-being of students. The work includes gathering strength based data to support programming, emotional regulation series prerecorded by staff last year, a prerecorded collaborative problem solving series, trauma informed PD done by a specialized mental health interventionists, adverse childhood experiences, and Mental Health Lit from School Mental Health Ontario.

Ms. Marino spoke about Addiction Education and Prevention, developing something new that is going to be well received, consistent, and strategically developed to support addiction, education, and prevention. More information will be shared at a later date.

Recommendation # 3

Trustee Topping moved that the verbal update on Mental Health be received.

The motion carried.

PIVOT Project

The verbal Pivot Project report was presented by Principal of Program Jonathan Walker, Secondary Curriculum Lead and Experimental Lead Tracy Hunter, Secondary Curriculum Lead Amy Turner, Elementary Curriculum Lead Heather Walker, and 21st Century Curriculum Lead Marni Reijmers. The presentation outlined the Pivot Project, an initiative that was established before the pandemic hit. The cross curricular team committed to working with teachers and all curriculum areas from kindergarten to grade 12 and supported them in integrating sustainability thinking, active citizenship, and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into their teaching practice.

Context was shared about the evolution of the Pivot Project through a collaboration between equity, elementary curriculum, secondary curriculum team and experimental learning that was initiated in 2018. It was reported the “Pivot” refers to a shift in practice towards the integration of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into everyday classrooms across grade levels and subject areas, as a way of embracing authentic learning tasks, the development of global competencies, and a focus on student well-being and pathways exploration. The word “Project” was chosen because the work is about process, collaboration and connection as opposed to a polished product. One of the biggest positive impacts noticed through this work was the focus on connections with the different portfolios across different panels and seeing the value in working together and alongside teachers in Upper Grand DSB. By connecting with community partners, teachers are creating rich, authentic learning opportunities with students and the work shared embeds best practices for instructional practices, assessment, and evaluation as well as honoring student voice and choice. Trustees asked questions of clarification and expressed thanks for all the work done in the schools.

Recommendation # 4

Trustee MacNeil moved that the verbal report for the PIVOT Project be received.

The motion carried.

Digital Citizenship

Principal of Program Jonathan Walker and 21st Century Curriculum Lead Marni Reijmers presented work that has been developed and planned by the Digital Citizenship Empowerment Committee which supports students, staff and parents

through technology, and shared the vision for moving forward of how digital citizenship should be a thread that weaves in and throughout all learning within the Upper Grand DSB. There continues to be a large shift in the needs within Upper Grand DSB since the beginning of the pandemic in using technology within the schools, as educators and students comfort level and willingness to try new tech tools has grown. Supports are now focused on how to engage learning in an online environment that is positive and safe for the students as well as motivating the students so they would use these skills when engaging in online activities outside of the school setting. This past fall a monthly online magazine called the “Dig Cit Dish” was published which supports educators and learning about the five competencies of digital citizenship, highlighting the digital citizenship connections, and sharing K-12 resources that teachers can use and modify to empower student voice while developing a positive online presence. Trustees asked questions and expressed thanks for the report.

Recommendation # 5

Trustee MacNeil moved that the verbal report for Digital Citizenship be received.

The motion carried.

OPSBA Report

Trustee Martha MacNeil reported that the first meeting of the new Board of Directors would not be happening until January 6, 2022 and noted if any time sensitive items arose from that meeting, she would bring them to the business operations meeting. Trustee MacNeil also reminded trustees of the OPSBA Public Education Symposium (PES) on January 28, 2022 and pointed out a few highlights from the program.

Trustee Busuttil also provided an update with the following highlights:

The Central West Regional virtual meeting was held on Saturday, November 6, 2021. Member boards provided input to OPSBA for the GSN Education Funding provincial consultation. The regional meeting also provided an opportunity for boards to give feedback on four Project Compass consultation documents. The next CW Regional Meeting will be held virtually after PES on January 28, 2022.

OPSBA Board met on November 27, 2021. Policy and Program Work Teams shared the final version of the OPSBA submission to the provincial GSN and Trustee Code of Conduct consultations.

The meeting included updates on two projects. The first was the Transitioning from the COVID-19 School Experience, and the discussion paper was released in May 2021. The provincial survey for the Transitioning from the COVID-19 School Experience that will be added to the final report, was still active at the time of the board meeting with over 3000 responses. The survey closed on November 30, 2021. The second was the French as a Second Language Labour Market Partnership [LMP] initiatives, which are taking place across national and provincial education sectors. The FSL LMP includes pilot projects for recruitment, retention, and support of FSL education workers and school administrators. Trustee Busutil expressed she was very pleased with the development of a “Grow Our Own” labour market strategy. This pilot project involved Charles Benyair from the Upper Grand DSB and she hopes to have a presentation on this secondary option in the coming months. This is a SHSM with a focus on courses and experiences to support youth who wish to pursue careers in an education stream.

Recommendation # 6

Trustee Lustgarten Evoy moved that the verbal OPSBA report be received.

The motion carried.

Other Business – nil report

Adjournment

Trustee Foley moved that this Committee adjourn at 9:42 p.m. to report to the Board.

The motion carried.

This document is available in alternate formats upon request.