

WARD H Council Network Meeting
Minutes
Thursday, November 6, 2008

Why People Attend School Councils

- To know what is happening in the school.
- To promote health and safety issues.
- It's a good way to be involved in my children's lives.
- To support staff.
- It's a good hobby.
- As a former teacher, it's a way of being involved with education and to contribute in a meaningful way.
- To see what needs to be done and to do it.
- To stay connected, to stay in the loop.
- To try and connect as many parents as possible to the school.
- To model to my kids that I'm interested in the school and education.
- It's a labour of love.
- To give my time (in a productive way).
- To get to know the teachers.
- To contribute to providing opportunities for kids.

Best Practices in Supporting Teaching and Learning

(Councils were asked to bring "one" best practice: some found it hard to contain themselves to one!)

Rideau Park: Providing support for those students who can't afford "extras" (hot lunches, field trips, special events)

Steinhauer: Providing support for teaching and learning through casino fundraising. Fundraising dollars support: subsidizing inside and outside school field trips for all students, subsidizing student in need, hosting family/student barbeque on last day of school to encourage parent, teacher and student relationships and celebrate learning, keeping school up-to-date in terms of technology, giving teachers small slush fund to pay for student incentives so they don't have to pay for this out of their own pocket, and purchasing read-at-home library books, math manipulatives, etc.

GH Luck (one week into new council): Gaining better understanding role and responsibility of school councils (council is arranging upcoming seminar through Alberta School Council Association).

Brander Gardens 1: The support provided on a daily basis by all the volunteers, which creates a wonderful family atmosphere in the school. "Every parent is every child's parent."

Riverbend Junior High: 1) Out of attending “Healthier Kids: How Do We Get There” Parents as Partners session in February 2007, we were inspired by Ottewell School and its initiatives with respect to snack shack and types of choices offered in vending machines. Council wanted to integrate this focus into the student leadership program, so one parent council member worked with leadership students to evaluate what was being offered in school store, revise options, and educate the school population. A year later, students are better educated as to what a healthy snack is, and menu items are healthier (and popular!).

2) In 2007-08, Council passed a motion supporting the goal of all RBJH students being life-long readers, and in support of that goal, has taken a lead role in upgrading of school library. School administration is having a library tech cull library and then two lead staff members along with interested parents will purchase new books and look at overall feel/welcome/layout of library. This will be supported through fundraising.

Earl Buxton: Supporting total transformation of technology in the school through using available grant money to maximize dollars raised through asking parents directly for funds and casino fundraising. The new technology has provided a creative spark for the school and a new excitement about both teaching and learning.

Westbrook: Taking care of our teachers (for example, providing special lunches during report card time, etc.)

Harry Ainlay: 1) Continuing to work on COMMUNICATION as a way to engage parents – using website, school zone, newsletters, email list of attendees at council meetings to get out council news and activities.

2) Development of “Parenting our Teens” articles for newsletter/website to assist parents in understanding and supporting their children during high school. Now in booklet format.

Sweet Grass: 1) Focusing on library and technology resources for school

2) Working on parent involvement.

Greenfield: Sharing the meeting date and time with the Parent \$\$\$ Society has been beneficial and promotes collaboration between both groups.

Keheewin (no casino fundraising has been done in past, so funds have been more limited): Thinking outside the box in terms of education and bringing in special people to work with kids and teachers (e.g. artist in residence, etc.).

George P Nicholson: Understanding the role of school council has made huge difference. Aiming for 10% of parents to be involved in council regularly (about 50). Developing a mission statement for our council and developing three-year plan in support of School’s three-year education plan (which they develop in reference to district priorities) has been excellent so we know the direction we want to go.

Brander Gardens 2: Supporting literacy focus with a home reading program.

Vernon Barford: The philosophy is “Happy teachers make happy kids which make happy parents” and the goal is to give back to three stakeholders (teachers, students, parents). For staff, the council hosts two luncheons a year and leaves mailbox goodies (surprises) as a way to say parents appreciate the work with children. For students, council hosts a year-end BBQ, educational speaker, and nutritional month. For parents, council meetings include community news, knowledge of school and teachers, and parents strategies. In addition, council supports CSI (community support initiative) – last year, this included a series of speakers on drug prevention, identifying and preventing bullying, and encouraging resiliency in children.

Council of School Councils: Folly or Fabulous?

After small group discussion, four out of four tables were in favour of further meetings. Value is perceived in the opportunity to network and share concerns, great ideas, lessons learned, and questions. Also, possibly, Ward H councils might want to partner to bring in a resource person/special speaker for all parents. Finally, meeting together (or staying in touch) would provide the opportunity to explore having “one voice” on issues (if and when they arise). The idea of splitting into High School/Junior High and Elementary for discussion was also raised.

The idea of setting up an electronic way of keeping in touch so one could ask for advice, send out relevant information, or be responsive to issues was discussed. A blog or bulletin board could be a possibility for the future (if there were someone willing to set this up). Sharing email addresses was viewed favourably, and an initial list was created and will be circulated to those on the list.

Possible topics for future discussion

- Hot Lunches
- Improving Attendance at Council meetings
- Outreach Ideas and Work
- Technology: what is basic/what is not.
- Role of School Councils
- Safety in our schools - allergy issues
- Safety around our schools - pedestrian/traffic issues
- Newsletters and communication to parents

Frequency of meeting: Not 100% clear yet. Quarterly was suggested OR Fall/Spring timing (twice a year). Rotating locations could be a great way to visit schools throughout the ward. (Note from Catherine: There are a couple of schools that just can't accommodate this due to small size and lack of evening custodian.)

Next steps:

- Aim to have a meeting in the New Year on “Role of School Councils” to be led by Barbara Jean. Catherine and Barbara Jean will discuss. Format/time/etc. to be circulated.
- Catherine to distribute minutes to all councils.
- Catherine to create and send out email list of contacts. (Catherine will also see if those absent last night wish to be part of this email list.)