

Report on Ward 8 Forum

Date: September 20, 2016

Place: John Polanyi Collegiate Institute

This was the first meeting of the school year for Toronto District School Board's Ward 8 (Eglinton-Lawrence). The meeting was chaired by Ward 8 Trustee Jennifer Arp. Highlights are set out below.

PRO Grant

TDSB awards grants to school councils as part of the Parent Reaching Out program. Last school year, Ward 8 applied for a PRO Grant, and was awarded a total sum of \$7,500 (which is significant relative to the amounts usually awarded).

The intention is to set up interactive workshops for all Ward 8 schools, with a focus on 3 areas, namely:

1. Resiliency and wellness
2. Math and literacy
3. 21st century learning

Input will be sought from school administrators, parents and students for ideas on how to structure these workshops, and these ideas will then be taken back to the schools for implementation.

Volunteers are needed for the coordinating committee. If you are interested, please contact Stephanie Chong, who is Allenby's Ward 8 representative this year (see end of report for contact information).

Remarks by John Malloy, TDSB Director of Education

We were fortunate to have John Malloy at the meeting. John was appointed Interim Director of Education at TDSB in January of this year (replacing former Director Donna Quan), and his position became permanent earlier this month.

John's remarks focused on 2 areas of concern which had been brought to his attention following consultations with stakeholders, as well as how TDSB proposes to address these concerns under his direction:

1. Parents were concerned about how to “navigate the system” – this will be addressed through RESPONSIVENESS.
2. Administrators were concerned about having too many initiatives and projects – this will be addressed through FOCUS.

Responsiveness

According to John, the goal is to make the system more accessible by implementing measures including the following:

- Dividing the schools among 4 Learning Centres. These are not physical structures; rather, they are meant to create communities among schools. Boundaries were chosen in an attempt to maximize diversity.
 - Allenby falls within Learning Centre 1.
 - Each Learning Centre encompasses about 140 schools and 7 superintendents (each with responsibility for about 20 schools). This is meant to streamline communications from parents who will be able to bring concerns to a superintendent within that Learning Centre (for example, where a resolution to an issue has not been found with the school principal/vice-principal).
 - Each Learning Centre also has 20 learning coaches.
 - The goal of the Learning Centres is to “bring the voice of the community back to the system”.
- Decreasing response times to communications from parents (benchmarks are being set as to maximum response times).
- Increasing reliance on more personal forms of communication, such as phone calls and in-person meetings.
- Seeking to streamline processes (for example, implementing on-line surveys for parents to give feedback).

A video with more details about the Learning Centres will be posted on the TDSB website.

Focus

John also stated that administrators’ concerns are being addressed through a simplifying of goals into 3 categories, collectively known as a “Vision for Learning”:

1. Achievement – academics will still focus on core subjects, but with a push into creative learning so that students will develop good character for global citizenship.

2. Well-being – this includes providing students with tools for self-confidence and optimism.
3. Equity – the objective is to always be thinking about equity as part and parcel of the other 2 goals.

Remarks by Aiman Flahat, Principal of John Polanyi Collegiate Institute

Aiman spoke about a successful partnership between his school and the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Business. A program on leadership studies was developed by Rotman and launched as a pilot project last year at Polanyi. It involved exercises such as real problem-solving with actual private and public sector entities. The program was so successful that it is now spreading to other schools in Toronto and the province.

Submitted by Stephanie Chong
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