

PHS School Council Minutes

Date: October 21, 2020, 7:00pm – 8:00pm (Virtual Google Meet)

Present: Paula Bender (Principal), Jeevan Vivegananthan (Past Chair), Linda Brennan (PHS Staff Rep), Total virtual attendance: 25 people

Next meeting: **Wednesday, November 25, 2020, 7-8pm, Virtual (GoogleMeet by invite)**

1. Introduction to Google Meets / Virtual Meeting Etiquette (Paula Bender)

- 45 people signed up and **25 people attended** the actual call. Everyone is super thrilled with the turnout which is the most ever, perhaps in PHS history.
- Please remind other parents that they must **sign-up in order to receive the invite to the virtual meeting** at [PHS School Council 2020,2021 Sign-Up Form](#). Only people who are signed up will be admitted into the next virtual meeting. The link alone is not good enough as Principal Bender will not admit anyone who is not signed up from the virtual waiting room (for security reasons).

2. Welcome and Elections (Jeevan Vivegananthan)

- Jeevan Vivegananthan elected chair for the 2020/2021 PHS School Council session
- Corey Kimpson volunteered to support the chair as necessary
- Jeevan can be reached at vivegan@sympatico.ca for anything council related including suggestions for agenda items

3. SAC Update (Students Ashely M & Karishma P)

- Ashley and Karishma gave a great update, noting that the Student Council is doing the best it can under the COVID19 restrictions with limitations on assembly, no sports etc. In particular, they gave updates on some creative ways that they helped students and staff have a bit of fun and to learn. Activity planning is on a week by week basis.
- **“Countdown to Grade 9 Videos”** were created to help new students get comfortable with the school while COVID-19 precautions were in-place
- **Spirit Days and Halloween week** activities like online games at “Kahoot” are being held
- **“Black and Orange”** clothing day for Halloween week is upcoming
- **Scavenger Hunts** setup for a bit of outside diversion on walks around the school grounds
- **“Preston Talk Show”** – council is setting up a weekly or bi-weekly show to spotlight different Panthers at study and at play. The talk shows are being designed especially for the Grade 9’s, showing them around the school and what life might be like once the restrictions are lifted. Some socially distant interview and virtual challenges will round out the talk-show. Filming starts next week.
- Students noted that it’s a big load for Grade 9’s to get adjusted to and the Student Council is doing its part to try and help. Returning Grade 10,11 & 12s are facing a challenge too with most of the normal in-school social activities being restricted.

4. Staff Report (Linda Brennan)

- Post-Secondary Information
 - **University and college representatives including apprenticeship program reps would normally visit the school** in September and October. Due to the

COVID19 assembly restrictions, the information sessions have been shifted online. Students are informed of the session dates and Linda Brennan and the Guidance department can be consulted for further information.

- The same reps come back in Spring for a follow-up and these sessions may be in-person
 - **“How to Apply to University”** and **“How to Apply to College”** sessions for students were held on-line in Google Meets by the Guidance department
 - **“How to Apply for Scholarships”** will be held for students on Tuesday, October 27th from 2-3pm. *** From last years school council, we have supplementary information on scholarships provided by other parents. Please contact Jeevan at vivegan@sympatico.ca for more information.
 - Linda noted that in order to apply to university, you do need a PIN. The PINs will be mailed directly to your homes which is a change from previous years.
- Google Classroom per Grade
 - In Grade 9, each student joins a Google classroom and that becomes their permanent place for the next four years.
 - Google classrooms are where Grade 11 and 12's get notified about the various on-line applications (as noted above) for example.
 - The great part about the Google classroom is that it gives a direct message to students and is a universal portal for information
 - Getting Support for Guidance
 - Any student can get guidance and parents are encouraged to reach out too by phone or e-mail.
 - Students can easily apply for a Guidance session by clicking on the Guidance tab on the school website. Guidance sessions are typically held while the student is at home.

5. Principal's Report (P. Bender)

- Ontario School COVID-19 Screening Tool
 - To aid parents with everyday screening of their own children, the government of Ontario provides an online tool at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/>
 - Parents do not have to submit the form but it is a good reference to help judge whether you should keep your child at home or not
 - Principal Bender noted that parents have been good with communicating around sick kids who are being kept at home
- Covid-19 Safety Precautions and Update
 - Parents were briefly shown a set of Health & Safety slides that the school uses to educate students on COVID-19 rules including common sense reminders and explicit school requirements.
 - [Covid-19 Safety Precautions and Update](#)
- Quadmester System and Quadmester 2 calendar
 - Two courses are taken at a time in each quadmester
 - Coming from Grade 8, the Grade 9 student learning pace is really fast. In normal school times, it would be about twice as fast as compared to Grade 8 but now in

the Quadmester given the hyper focus, it's about 4x times as fast and that has been a struggle for the Grade 9's in general.

- The school and board are continuously looking at ways to help students adapt and it's very fast even for the Grade 10's and above. For example, having a midterm update on September 30th is pretty crazy given the start just after Labour Day.
 - Principal Bender noted that if the students are not engaging in their "at home" block, it's very difficult for them to keep up. Parents discussed the challenges of on-line learning at length based in part, around this topic and it has been recommended as an agenda item for the next school council meeting.
 - The 2nd Quadmester schedule has not yet been formalized and is waiting upon final official word from WDRSB
 - Quadmester 2 begins on November 16th
- Staffing Update
 - 75% of students are continuing to learn in the hybrid adapted mode (50% in-class / 50% on-line). The other 25% are moving to full at home digital learning.
 - That represents a shift from the original timetables created for Spring. This means that some teachers will have to switch to all-digital due to the greater on-line enrollment. The re-timetabling for this Quadmester and next is in complicated for these reasons.
 - While every effort is being made to keep student cohorts consistent, some students will change from the first Quadmester. Cohorts are influenced heavily by transportation needs.
 - EQAO Math Assessment
 - EQAO assessment will continue with Math for Grade 9 and Literacy for Grade 10
 - Few hard details have been provided but we will have time to prepare
 - EQAO Math *should* be in November but this has not been confirmed. Since it's a single day assessment and schools are running in Quadmasters with math not necessarily having been taught, the scheduling is very complicated between that and COVID-19 restrictions.
 - They are field testing the EQAO to see if it works being run virtually
 - Literacy test will be April 29th but unsure if it will be virtual or regular in-person
 - Commencement - Friday November 27th - WRDSB Wide Virtual Event
 - Sad but out of necessity, the commencement will be held virtually

6. Parent 2 Parent Advice (Jeevan Viveganathan)

- Jeevan advised that materials from past council meetings are available including scholarship info learned by other parents
- Parents are seeking advice on how to help their children do well on-line and that will be a primary agenda item for the next school council meeting with parent 2 parent advice as well as board advice

7. Other Business / Parent Questions / Future Agenda Topics (J. Vivegananthan)

- Extra Curricular Resources for Grade 9
 - Are there any resources available for grade 9? Where can I find them? For those who are 100% online, whom can you turn to for help with respect to extra curricular activities?
 - Paula: Extra curricular activities are essentially curtailed. There is lots of information on the PHS website. The Guidance counsellor is an excellent point of contact. It's a tough situation for parents and children alike.
 - Linda: Student Volunteering is not as open as usual, but there are some virtual volunteer actions. Volunteer Action Centre: <https://www.volunteerwr.ca/> has some of these detailed.

- Is the Enhanced program running?
 - Paula: The Enhanced Program is not offered in the digital learning program. It is only being applied for the in-school program. In reality, even for the in-school program, the normal enhancements are not being done given the COVID-19 restrictions. Students will remain in that program once restrictions lifted but today, it's complicated by our reality.

- Will EQAO still happen for Grade 9's this year?
 - Paula: Yes, answered in-line (see notes above)

- Can you encourage your teachers to do parallel teaching?
 - Parent: Our daughters are having an easier time learning with the teachers that do this. It's wonderful. The teachers that don't can sometimes leave the kids at home with little to do and poor instructions for 5 days.
 - Paula: Has not been mandated but good feedback and will share that with staff.

- How can parents make a good decision with the deadlines around keeping kids in-school or pulling them out for far away in the future?
 - Paula: Agreed that parents are put in a very awkward situation with a very tough, if not impossible decision to make. The challenge is that it's not easy to manage for a school given the massive and complex logistics. We encourage parents to reach out to the school if they are really concerned and the school will try to work it out and ensure that no student is left-behind if pulled out for safety reasons, outside of the deadlines set.

- We are finding gaps in learning from courses that were interrupted last year with COVID.
 - Parent: Our understanding was that teachers would focus on catching our kids up as a priority but I understand that has been difficult to accommodate in practice. It has been a huge issue for our son though. In our case, he missed a lot of grade 9 math and doesn't learn well remotely. We were able to get him a tutor but there are very serious gaps in his knowledge still, which gave him a rocky start to grade 10 math. Not sure how to solve this issue beyond parents stepping up but wanted to bring it up.
 - Paula: Would like to connect, not a good solution with just tutors. Very challenging to work. No easy answers. Reach out. This is good feedback both as your individual case and as a general topic for all.

- Are there exams?
 - Paula: No, there are no exams. Summative days to assess students but exams are not practical so we are not doing them this year. It's not equitable across different learning modes.
- Struggles with Online learning
 - Parent: Grade 8 for me was a bit of a fail to get kids learning online, too many messages come our way that if kids were finding it too hard they didn't have to do the work i.e. their marks will not go down. I'm struggling a bit right now keeping my boy focused on the online work he needs to get this work done in order to pass his classes.
 - Paula: Messaging marks couldn't change (get worse) to some students didn't work and they just didn't work as hard and that has followed them into school this year. Has been a struggle for many. Keeping kids focused in hybrid is also tough, not just online.
 - Parent: My son is struggling with the online part of school, as he does not do well with online work, how can I best support him with this?
 - Jeevan: Will bring this up as a parent to parent advice topic for next council meeting and suggested that WDRSB might have "best practices" information too
 - Paula: Will investigate "best practices" with the board and school resources
 - Paula: In the interim, for each specific students, all of the regular support channels remain available. Reach out to Guidance in particular.
 - Here is a link about 6 scientifically backed ways to study better - it is not a way to motivate students, but it is useful for helping students improve their learning: <https://www.learningscientists.org/downloadable-materials>
 - Here is a link from the University of Guelph about getting motivated online: <https://guides.lib.uoguelph.ca/OnlineLearning/Motivation>
- In regards to students who are struggling but are at home, e.g. financial issues including a lack of food and supplies etc , Can they access that even though not in-school?
 - Paula: Yes, supports are still available including nutrition for those who are in the full digital at-home learning program. Don't try and navigate it alone. Reach out to a Guidance counsellor and we will work it out.
- Volunteer opportunities are limited at this time. Will students be expected to get volunteer hours this year?
 - Linda B: Grade 9, 10, 11 should aim for the normal 40 hours, for grade 12 it's limited to 20 given the COVID-19 restrictions

**Next meeting: Wednesday, November 25, 2020, 7-8pm
Virtual (Google Meeting by invite)**

/jv