

EQUINOX HOLISITIC ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

Council Meeting Minutes February 15, 2017

Library | 1 pm – 2:30 pm

SCHOOL COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES

(In Attendance)

Co-Chair: Matthew Hall
Co-Chair & Secretary: Angela Matich
Co-Treasurer: Jillian Dempsey
A.S.A.C. * Rep.: Borianna Karan
Student Rep.: Zara Wong

SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVES

(In Attendance)

Principal: Mark Lasso
Vice Principal: Chris O’Shaughnessy

*A.S.A.C. = Alternative School Advisory Council

ADDITIONAL MEETING ATTENDEES

Heather Wong, Syd Grainger, Dorothy Hrischenko

VOTING PROCESS

All parent attendees were able to vote on anything presented during the meeting. Whether a vote was passed or not has been recorded below. Before each vote, the School Council motioned for the vote and one of the meeting attendees seconded it.

OPENING

Zara opened the School Council meeting by reading the TDSB acknowledgement of the Traditional Territories/Ancestral lands of Aboriginal peoples. Next, Matt led the group through an opening circle where everyone was invited to share their name, their children’s names and grades, as well as one memory of their favourite teacher.

JANUARY 2017 MEETING NOTES

The meeting notes from January were approved.

PRINCIPAL & VICE PRINCIPAL SCHOOL UPDATES

RED DOOR SHELTER

The Red Door Shelter has officially opened and has expanded its services to include assisting new refugees to Canada. Roden has recently received 12 new students from the Red Door Shelter. The school administration is working hard to ensure all of these new families feel welcomed at Roden and are receiving the supports they need to transition successfully into the school.

DRAIN REPAIR & REPLACEMENT

Beginning sometime in February, work will begin on repairing and replacing part of the drainage system on the south side of the gymnasium and along the east side out to Ashdale Avenue. It will be done in stages and last until spring. Safety hoarding (safety fencing) will go up as required however we kindly ask everyone to be aware of any areas that may be temporarily inaccessible.

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TEACHER ON LEAVE

Desmond the grade 4/5 teacher is currently on personal leave. The date of his return at this time is unknown. During his absence, Tera the Equinox French teacher will be covering his class part-time. Marcia, one of our school's founding Equinox teachers, has kindly ended her one-year long sabbatical earlier and she will also be covering this class part-time. On behalf of the school, we thank both teachers for stepping up to teach the grade 4/5 students.

TDSB STAFF ALLOCATION FOR 2017-2018

All TDSB schools have begun the enrolment and staffing/resource allocation process for the next 2017-2018 school year. One parent expressed during the meeting that they felt that not enough communication about this process has been given to the Equinox parent community. The School Council explained that to date this information was communicated with the parent community as follows:

1. An email from the Principal was sent in December.
2. The online School Council budget survey results included this information. Those responses were emailed to the parent community and are posted on the Equinox parent community website.
3. It was shared via the Equinox School Council Facebook page and was also posted on other local community Facebook pages (combined over 10,000+ followers in the local area) when discussions about enrolment at Equinox occurred.

The parent still felt more could be done to better communicate this information to the school community. Although it's environmentally unfriendly, the School Council agreed to do a paper flyer in the students' school bags and additional communications. The Equinox School Council reminded everyone that parents also have a responsibility to read all school communications to stay properly informed about their children's education and ongoing school activities.

TDSB PROCESS

As an alternative school, Equinox, is an optional attendance school. Starting last year 2015-2016, TDSB froze all optional attendance schools' enrolment numbers so that they could reduce overall student movement between the schools to better assess and allocate resources.

TDSB requires that ALL of its schools submit their current enrolment numbers to them each year by February. *Here comes the important part*, with alternative school numbers being frozen in 2015-2016, our Principal was only allowed to accept new students to Equinox in the 2016-2017 school year if he knew a current enrolled student was leaving. In that situation, only, could our Principal designate that placement on the enrolment list he submitted to TDSB towards a new student off the waitlist. That meant if a student decided to leave our school after those enrolment numbers were submitted to TDSB, then that desk had to remain empty for the upcoming school year.

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Last year, TDSB did not take into account Equinox's waitlist of more than 170 students in that process. The result, only 25 new students were accepted at Equinox in the 2016-2017 school year, that included mostly JKs. Based on that process, TDSB decided to merge our middle grades from three to two classes increasing the overall number of students per each class.

Hold on to your hats because it gets even more complicated. If one of those NEW students declined their spot at Equinox before the end of the first two weeks of school, then Equinox could replace them with someone off the waitlist. After the first two weeks, then those new student seats became frozen as well by TDSB.

Here comes the good news. This year TDSB has agreed that Equinox may follow a new process for the 2017-2018 school year enrolment numbers. We will be able to count applicants from our waitlist as firm numbers to supplement our current enrolment. This will help Equinox increase and maintain our enrolment numbers in the next school year at approx. 200 students vs. the current 189. However, like all other optional schools, our lists will be frozen after those enrolment numbers are submitted to TDSB. If an existing student leaves Equinox after that information has been confirmed with TDSB in March, then that spot will remain empty. If there is enough movement in different grades, it could result in the collapsing of three classes into two again to maximize staff allocations across the entire school board.

If you are a parent considering moving your child from Equinox, it is imperative that you inform our Principal as soon as possible before the end of February. With more than 170 students on our long waitlist, it would be a shame to have a seat left empty at Equinox.

NEXT STEPS IN THE ENROLMENT PROCESS

The Principal confirmed that TDSB has predetermined school class model breakdowns for how teachers are allocated and the number of students per each class. TDSB selects the best models possible within preset parameters.

When asked the Principal explained that a parent representative is not part of that process because again it is based on pre-allocated models designed by TDSB in which the best possible model is selected. This is why student movement at Equinox, the enrolment numbers, class space available etc. all plays such an important role in that process.

The Principal did confirm that a School Council representative does supervise the lottery process for JK enrolment.

The School Council questioned if students are taking prolonged leave, such as parents taking them out of the school for six months to a year to travel impacted those TDSB decisions. The Principal confirmed they could. The School Council plans to research and discuss the TDSB prolonged absence process further.

MENTAL HEALTH

Two Ryerson Nursing Students are working with both Roden and Equinox staff and students on mental health for 12 weeks to identify areas of interest and to share where individuals can find help and support. In May they plan to host a Mental Health week for both schools.

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SCHOOL COUNCIL AGENDA ITEMS

BUDGET BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The School Council informed everyone that if all the items listed on the meeting agenda were approved the School Council would still have approx. \$2,000 of funds left unallocated for this year. They also shared that the p.i.n.e. project shortfall this year is no longer \$4,000, but closer to approx. \$2,500. This change in the p.i.n.e. project shortfall is why the School Council would now have \$2,000 remaining in unallocated funds if everything on the meeting agenda was approved.

Furthermore, they explained that historically past Equinox School Councils funded both Tech and Music for approx. \$1,500 each. These two categories were not included in the December online budget survey because that information was not yet available from the teachers. At the January 16, 2016 School Council meeting both Music and Tech were discussed and scheduled to be voted on at the February 15th meeting.

TECH – APPROVED (\$2,320.28)

- Eco-colour printer with refillable ink cartridges. (\$777.38) The printer will be stored on the main floor in the JK/SK classroom and used by all teachers and students as needed for lessons and projects.
- Five Acer C740 Chrome Books. (\$1,543.40) This will bring the total number of Chrome Books available to grade 4-8 students to a total of 18.

BOOK PUBLISHING CLUB – APPROVED (\$500)

Support the cost to professionally produce hard cover copies of the Equinox students' original books. These copies will be available and remain in the school library for all to enjoy. The club has approx. 100 students between grades 1 to 3 from both Roden and Equinox. One-third of those students are from Equinox.

MUSIC – APPROVED (\$1,058)

- 13 new music stands (approx. \$571) to replace the broken ones and increase the overall number of stands available for student use, including extracurricular clubs for both schools.
- Three Alto Glockenspiels to complete the class collection of ORFF instrument (\$407).
- One copy of the Music Orff Mosaic Canada book (approx.\$80).

MOVIE NIGHTS

Angela confirmed all the movie nights have been allocated for this year: Friday, February 24th – grade 7/8 year-end trip, Friday, April 28th – French resources, and Friday, June 9th (P.A. Day 10 am -12 pm) – kindergarten program. June is historically a low attendance month for the movie night. The School Council has decided to try hosting a matinee movie event on the P.A. Day in June to try and increase attendance numbers. The event will be promoted to the greater local community and local daycares as the perfect thing to do on the P.A. Day.

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PARENT SOCIAL

The Parent Social will be hosted this year on Saturday, April 1st at a private residence known as the Fire Hall. The tickets will be \$15 per person before the event and \$20 at the door. Cash bar. The space holds approx. 100 people so the hopes are that the event will be sold out before April 1st. The feature act is a comedian who will perform between 9 pm and 9:30 pm. Afterwards there will be dancing. Parents, teachers and staff are all welcome to attend. There will be no silent auction this year, but a 50/50 draw. The purpose of this event is to cover the hard costs vs. an active school fundraiser. If any funds are raised at the event they will go to subsidize school field trips.

The Principal will confirm with the School Council if its insurance policy will cover this event or if they need to purchase additional insurance.

Angela noted that a liquor license is being secured and all parent volunteer bar tenders will be required to have Smart Serve certification.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE (PEC)

The recent Parent Engagement Committee “Holistic Approach to Education” Parent Workshop was a big success. It had almost 40 adults attend and approx. 15 kids.

PEC met the day before on February 14th and plan to work on the following four projects moving forward:

1. **Online Volunteer Skills Database** – A form will be developed on the Equinox School Council website that parents can fill out listing all the skills they are willing to share and volunteer to the Equinox community. This database can then be accessed by all teachers and the council.
2. **Volunteering** – Adding information to the School Council website and creating a flyer about the importance of parent volunteerism and how it supports Equinox’s success as an alternative holistic school.
3. **PRO Grant** – Apply for the 2017-2018 Pro Grant in the Spring and develop a series of parent workshops on holistic learning for the next school year, including repeating the Holistic Approach to Education Workshop.
4. **Alternative School Conference** – Approach TDSB and ASAC about developing a Toronto Alternative Schools Conference for the 2017-2018 school year where teachers, parents and students can meet, host workshops and attend lectures, as well as share their own success stories.

MENTAL HEALTH WORKSHOPS

Matt confirmed the “Healthy Strategies for Responding to Challenging Emotions in Children” Mental Health Workshop went really well. It had approx. 60 adults and 18 kids in attendance. The PowerPoint Presentation from that event is currently available on the Equinox School Council website under the Resources section. There are three more workshops planned for this year. The next one is about anxiety in children and is on Tuesday, March 7th between 6:30 pm and 8:30 pm. Childcare is available for children over 3 years of age.

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The Equinox School Council explained the Mental Health workshops are being hosted by both Roden and Equinox. Roden is using their PRO Grant to cover the speaker fees and Equinox is covering the food and childcare services through separate TDSB parent outreach funds.

TRACK & FIELD TRANSPORTATION

Roden is exploring securing buses for the track and field event in June so students don't have to travel by public transit which can be long and tiring. They have invited Equinox to share in those costs and services. Once more information becomes available, the Equinox School Council will share it with the community for further discussion.

STUDENT COUNCIL & EGG FUNDRAISING UPDATE

The School Council would like to give the Student Council a working budget to further engage and empower the Equinox student body. They are being invited to play an active role in improving student life at Equinox and given the funds to make it happen. Currently, students have absolutely no formal say in how the funds raised by our School Council are to be used. Only Equinox parents and teachers make those decisions. That process does not support the pedagogy of the school and its holistic approach to education where student-led learning is a core element.

The School Council shared that they met the prior day with eight Equinox teachers ranging in grades. Tera confirmed with the council that she currently manages the Equinox Student Council which has grade 7/8 student participants. During the teacher meeting, it was agreed that the Student Council would be further expanded to also include grade 6 students. Furthermore, to ensure equity and equality, the Student Council members would become class reps for all the other grades. This way every grade could actively participate in Student Council decision-making.

While the School Council was sharing information at the February 15th meeting, Zara the student rep and several other parents asked if the Student Council could be expanded even further to include grades 4 to 8. Two parents offered to volunteer to help with the Student Council as they understood that expanding the council across so many grades would mean more work for the teacher volunteers. This information was passed onto the teachers and existing Student Council. They have agreed to expand the Student Council further to include grades 4 to 8.

The School Council will give the Student Council the funds raised from the egg program as they are being raised between January to June, approx. \$1,800 in total. Then in June, the School Council will review how well the Student Council used that working budget. If it went well, the School Council may decide that all the egg program funds will be provided to the Student Council the next 2017-2018 school year. Again, those funds would be given as they are raised, approx. \$4,000 in total (\$300+/month).

CLOSING REMARKS

One parent attendee thanked the School Council for hosting an afternoon meeting because she is unable to attend evening meetings.

Matt thanked everyone for attending the meeting.