

EQUINOX HOLISITIC ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

Council Meeting Minutes May 10, 2017

Library | 6 pm – 7:40 pm

SCHOOL COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES

(In Attendance)

Co-Chair: Matthew Hall
Co-Chair & Secretary: Angela Matich
Co-Treasurer: Cherokee MacLeod
A.S.A.C. * Rep.: Boriana Karan

SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVES

(In Attendance)

Vice Principal: Chris O'Shaughnessy
Teacher Reps: Lori Baxter, Marcia McVean,
Robert Walters

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

ADDITIONAL MEETING ATTENDEES (In-Person)

Gabriela Hubenova, Branco Karan, Lisa Olafson, Heather Bell, Matthew Humphries, Andrea Schneider, Lorien Iantonmasi, Denise Blinn, Genevieve Lennox, Tina Faridi, Shelagh Smith.

ADDITIONAL MEETING ATTENDEES (Virtual)

Amelia Golden, Erin Stoik, Kelly Drennan, Gary Mansbridge, Kristin Simpson, Lauren Baker, Lisa Dickie, Nick Zubacs, Ruthann Henry.

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

The School Council meeting opened by reading the TDSB acknowledgement of the Traditional Territories/Ancestral lands of Aboriginal peoples. Next, Matt led the in-person group through an opening circle where everyone was invited to share their name, their children's names and grades, as well as one word that summed up a positive attribute about the Equinox community.

VIRTUAL MEETING PARTICIPATION

The School Council used Google Hangout during this meeting to encourage more parents to participate. Google Hangout was tested the day prior to the meeting in the library and worked very well; however, the night of the meeting, the sound function did not work properly. This resulted in Angela loosely transcribing the meeting for those using Google Hangout. Next fall, the School Council will try another software program to see if it works better.

Since Angela was busy transcribing, she was limited in her participation during the meeting. She has taken the time to add more details and background information where required in the following meeting notes for the community's reference. That information has been marked accordingly.

APRIL 2017 MEETING NOTES

The meeting notes from April were approved. All meeting notes from this school year are available online at www.EquinoxSchool.ca for reference.

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TEACHER UPDATE

- **Chrome Books**

*****More information has been added to this section by Angela after the meeting.*****

Two Chrome Books were purchased with the funds provided by the School Council earlier this year. Equinox currently has 15 Chrome Books, including those two new ones for approx. 90 students between grades 4 to 8 to share. That is one computer per 6 students between grades 4 to 8. These tools are used by the students to conduct online research, develop reports, presentations, collaborate on projects, etc. For example, conducting research on renewable energy sources, developing independent project slideshow presentations, creating a water documentary, etc. Equinox classes are also allocated access once a week to the library computer lab with 34 desktops which are shared with Roden. The School Council Grants and Awards Committee this year applied for a Best Buy grant for up to \$10,000. If awarded the funds will go to purchase more Chromebooks and a cart to store them in which charges and allows for software updates. This grant, if awarded, would enable one class of Equinox students to use the Chromebooks at the same time during the same lesson plan. Equinox will know if it has been awarded the Best Buy Grant by the end of this May.

- **Grade 7/8 Year End Trip**

The Grade 7/8 class has been working hard fundraising throughout the year to reduce the end of year Ottawa trip fees. The price was originally \$650/student. It is now \$445/student. Marcia informed the School Council that a few students in Kyle's class cannot afford the trip and requested additional funds from the School Council so no student is left behind. The School Council after this May 10th meeting informed Kyle that they cannot fund the approx. \$1,500 trip shortfall; however, they could possibly host a last-minute fundraiser to try and help raise those funds. Kyle needs to confirm how he wishes to proceed.

- **Student Council Arts Fair – Wednesday, May 17th**

The School Council will send out another request for parent volunteers and folding tables for the Student Council's school-wide Arts Fair.

- **Student Council Garden Update**

The Student Council will be inviting each student to plant a seed in Equinox's outdoor garden spaces. Heather Bell raised a concern during the meeting about lack of water supply. Last year she had to carry water in containers from her home to keep the gardens watered. The School Council will investigate water supplies for the garden.

- **Earth Day Celebrations**

A parent asked if the Earth Day Celebrations will need to be relocated due to recent heavy rainfalls which have impacted the local beaches. Marcia was not sure at this time.

- **Book Publishing Club – This was discussed at the end of the meeting.**

The Book Publishing Club collected \$6,455 this year for the program and has \$2,679.52 remaining. The remaining funds will be forwarded to the 2017-2018 school year's Book Publishing Club: \$2,394.52 Roden and Equinox \$280. Mr. Robert Walters also confirmed he has applied for grants and is investigating sponsorship opportunities to hopefully reduce the costs for the club next year. He also thanked everyone who helped make this club such a huge success,

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especially the numerous volunteers who spent lunch hours working with the students to develop their books.

STAFF APPRECIATION BREAKFAST (Approx. \$300 Approved)

The Equinox/Roden School Councils are collaborating on a joint school staff appreciation breakfast on Monday, June 19th. They have secured numerous hot breakfast catering quotes and settled on the social enterprise The Paint Box in Regent Park. The cost is \$20/pp. The councils will still need to purchase a few extra things, such as juice. Both councils will use their existing napkin, cups, plates, utensil supplies before making any new purchases. It was suggested that we ask each staff member to bring their own plate, cup and utensils; however, the School Council believes it should have enough to cover everything. Worst case, Angela has offered to personally buy reusable plates we can wash and keep for future use so no staff are required to bring their own plates and cutlery to their own appreciation breakfast.

Parents are also more than welcome to donate baked goods to this event. Please email the School Council if you plan on donating baked goods so we know how many to expect: chair@equinoxschool.ca.

MOVIE NIGHT SUPPLIES (Approved)

The School Council at the start of the year bought enough snack supplies for approx. three movie nights (February, April and June) from Costco. Those costs were covered in full and deducted from the School Council budget in February. A portion of the snack/drink costs were reimbursed from the February Movie Night revenue. The School Council's original goal was to get reimbursed the remaining \$285 supplies costs from the April and/or June events. Unfortunately, the April Movie Night only raised \$343.50 due to low attendance. The School Council has since decided to cancel the June Movie Night because they believe it will have an even lower attendance than the April event.

Angela explained that this year the School Council's community building events have seen sporadic support in both parent volunteers and general attendance numbers. The School Council is investigating new fundraising efforts that may better appeal to the Equinox community, such as a Kids Night Out where parents can drop off their kids for a night of fun activities and childcare while they can grab some free time. Another idea suggested at the meeting was a student dance.

Two parents also noted that they would prefer only healthy food options at all Equinox organized events, especially home-made baked goods. Angela explained that when she did ask for baked good for the April Movie Night she only received four things and three of them were from the School Council Executive Members. Another example she provided was the James and the Giant Peach Wednesday Bake Sales where the same small handful of parent volunteers baked every week for several weeks in a row. The School Council is working hard trying to get parents engaged in the community; however, it has had limited success to date.

The School Council asked meeting attendees if it was okay to give the full \$343.50 to Equinox for French resources. They agreed. The remaining snacks/drinks can easily be stored and kept for use next school year once more fundraising activities are planned.

Cherokee also confirmed that the approx. \$200 Movie License Fee she had originally had allocated in the School Council budget will go through TDSB funds, So, these two things (supplies and license) somewhat cancel each other out.

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PROXY VOTING

An Equinox parent requested that the School Council add to the May meeting agenda a discussion on proxy voting. When this topic was raised during the meeting, several parents who were on the past Bylaw Committee explained why proxy voting was purposely not included in the 2015 updated bylaws. The overall committee believed proxy voting would reduce proper due process, discussions and debate about topics leading up to the vote. For example, new information could be presented during a School Council meeting which could have changed how an Equinox parent may have voted; however, with proxy voting that parent wouldn't be privy to that information prior to casting their vote ahead of said meeting.

The group agreed, instead of proxy voting, the School Council should continue to investigate and incorporate better quality call-in/link-in options to enable more Equinox parents to participate remotely in meetings and votes.

BUDGET SHORTFALL – the p.i.n.e. project

- The School Council recapped the [April 12th meeting notes](#) regarding the p.i.n.e. project which are currently available on the School Council website. The notes covered the parent and student survey summary results, background information and numerous updates.
- Cherokee, the School Council Co-Treasurer, confirmed this year's shortfall was one of the lowest on record at \$1,717. A big thank you to Jodi who worked hard to collect those funds.
- Marcia confirmed that Equinox raised through A Time for Gardens the previous weekend over \$1,400 for the Outdoor Education Program. Depending on how the vote went during the council meeting that night those funds could potentially go towards the p.i.n.e. project shortfall for the next school year.
- Parents and teachers spoke passionately, many for and some against the p.i.n.e. project, during the meeting. Several retelling stories based on their own personal experiences and their children's experiences with the p.i.n.e. project.
- In the end the following was agreed upon as next steps:

- **SHORTFALL:** The majority attending the School Council meeting both in-person and through Google Hangout voted in favour of the School Council covering the p.i.n.e. project shortfall for the upcoming 2017-2018 school year.

This vote was consistent with the 98 completed parent surveys which showed an 80% trend supporting the School Council covering the p.i.n.e. project shortfall.

The \$1,400 recently raised from the Time for Gardens will go towards that shortfall.

- **SCHEDULE D:** Many at the meeting agreed the p.i.n.e. project was not adhering to the City of Toronto existing bylaws and contracts. Marcia will be speaking with Andrew when he gets back from vacation later in May about this matter and get back to the School Council with an update.

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- **ECO STEWARDSHIP DEFINED:** Equinox will explore creating its own pledge/definition of "good" Eco Stewardship that can provide clear guidelines on best practices. It could possibly be something everyone can recite before participating in nature walks, Brickworks, the p.i.n.e. project etc. This Eco Stewardship definition will help further educate and remind students, staff and even field trip volunteers how to respect and preserve the sensitive environment while still being able to actively engage, learn and have fun.
- **EXPLORATION COMMITTEE**
Each year the teachers at Equinox try to find and use the best programs the city has to offer, such as Brickworks and the p.i.n.e. project. During that process they consider relationship continuity, leader to student ratio, and visions and practice.

The School Council strives to better support and advise the parent community and school on matters for student achievement—a role specified by TDSB. We plan to create a committee to research and explore all third-party outdoor education service options to become more knowledgeable on offerings currently available in the marketplace. Please contact the School Council if you are interested in participating on this new committee: chair@equinoxschool.ca.

JK/SK CLASSROOM RELOCATION

The School Council shared that Lori's JK/SK 3rd floor classroom may be relocated in the fall to the main floor of the school. This change would greatly improve student life by reducing the required travel time between the outdoor and indoor classrooms. Currently, the kindergarten students can take a long time navigating the stairs being so little.

Lori explained that she can spend up to 40 minutes daily travelling to and from the third floor with the kindergarten students. By moving the classroom to the main floor, the kindergarten students will be able to replace some of that travel time with more hands-on learning.

The School Council outlined that the kindergarten classroom may move into the two spec ed rooms located in the back corner of the library. Lori's class has already been temporarily using the library this year to store the JK/SK students' outdoor clothing and bags. This makes it easier for the students to navigate the stairs without having to carry their outdoor clothing and bags to the existing 3rd floor classroom. If Lori's classroom moves permanently into the library spec ed rooms, then the existing divider wall would have to be removed to accommodate that relocation. The cost for that renovation is unknown by the School Council.

Although the relocation to the library will greatly improve JK/SK student life by saving travel time between the outdoor to indoor classroom space, it lacks bathroom access. In this new classroom space, students would have to leave unsupervised in pairs to use the bathrooms by Sandee's JK/SK classroom.

Lori's existing third floor classroom also lacks bathroom facilities. Currently JK/SK students leave the classroom and use the staff washroom also located on the third floor. Lori does not have an ECE, so she must watch both the kids in her classroom and the students using the staff washroom.

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Angela mentioned that the Breakfast Room, located on the main floor near the outdoor classroom space has a child-sized bathroom. Currently, that space is being used in the early morning for the Breakfast Club. Then it is briefly used by the kindergarten students to eat lunch and sometimes snacks depending if the weather conditions are bad. A few parents in the meeting, commented how that space used to be where the drop-in program existed when their children were very little.

The school currently has a total of three different working kitchens available for use: breakfast room, next to the breakfast room and in the gym. It was mentioned that Breakfast Club has been experiencing ongoing challenges with families wandering in well after it is supposed to be closed at 8:50 am. The room cannot be locked because the kindergarten classes store their lunches in there at the start of every day. This has resulted in families wandering in well past 9 am delaying the Breakfast Club staff from being able to do their required clean-up and prep for the next day.

The meeting attendees agreed they are very pleased to see Lori's classroom move to the main floor. They also trust the school admin to make the best possible choices for all student/staff well-being; however, they would strongly encourage the school to consider the bathroom access for the health and safety of its students regardless of where they decide to place Lori's classroom this fall.

CULTURAL PERFORMANCES

Chris asked if he can book the Beat Box Boys for next year's professional Cultural Performances now because they book up fast. The group agreed he should go ahead and book them. The Equinox School Council will either fundraise to cover those Cultural Performance costs or students can pay-out-of-pocket like previous years. This past 2016-2017 school year, the Equinox School Council covered the \$1,328 cost for all Equinox students to see three different Cultural Performances hosted in the school gym.

RODEN/EQUINOX JOINT COUNCIL MEETING

CURRICULUM NIGHT

Equinox/Roden School Councils will work together to sell food such as pizza and homemade baked goods to help make it easier for families to grab dinner and participate in the September Curriculum Night. Any funds raised will go to support a shared building resource like the Library.

FALL KID CLOTHING EXCHANGE

Equinox/Roden School Councils hope to host a joint kids clothing exchange this fall, maybe in October. It would also be open to the public. The thought is clothing could be dropped off all week at the school. Then on Friday afternoon/evening it would be sorted in the gym by size. The actual event would be held on a Saturday morning. Any clothing not exchanged could be donated and picked up by a charity.

Chris said he needs to confirm about hosting this event on a Saturday as TDSB regulations limit weekend access for events.

2017-2018 RODEN/EQUINOX SCHOOL COUNCILS – MEETING CHILDCARE

This past 2016-2017 school year, Roden/Equinox School Councils combined spent over \$700 to offer free childcare services in the gym during council meetings to encourage greater parent community engagement.

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Unfortunately, this service was hardly used by either parent community. Starting next year, instead of offering free childcare, both Roden and Equinox parents are welcome to bring their children with them to the council meetings held in the library. The library has a maker space area where kids can play.

TDSB 5-YEARS EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATION RELOCATION

TDSB tends to move their school Principals and Vice Principals generally every 5 years; however, never at the same time. This ensures continuity at the school while these changes occur. Mark has been at Equinox/Roden for 5 years and Chris 6 years. TDSB usually announces these changes by June. Chris said he will keep both councils posted if he hears anything.