

EQUINOX HOLISITIC ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

Council Meeting Minutes September 18, 2017

Library | 6 pm – 7:40 pm

SCHOOL COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES

(In Attendance)

Co-Chair: Matthew Hall
Co-Chair: Angela Matich
Co-Treasurer: Jillian Dempsey

(In Attendance)

Principal: Catherine Pollock
Vice Principal: Chris O'Shaughnessy

ADDITIONAL MEETING ATTENDEES

Stasha Mohammed, Tina Faridi, Victoria L'Esperance, Erin Stoik, Heather Bell, Shelagh Smith, Jacqui Forgeard, Peggy Messing, Jocelyn Wickett, Lorien Iantomasi, Syd Grainger, Genevieve Lennex, Kelly Drennan, Denise Blinn

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 group through an opening circle where everyone was invited to share their name, their children's names and grades, as well as one thing they are hoping their children learn this school year.

JUNE MEETING NOTES

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

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL VOTE

Angela read the text below to remind the group what the School Council's role is at Equinox.

THE ONTARIO MINISTRY OF EDUCATION SAYS....

School councils play a vital role in the education system in Ontario. They provide a forum through which parents and other members of the school community can contribute to improving student achievement and school performance.

Ontario Regulation 612/00 confirms the advisory role of school councils and clearly states that our purpose is **to improve student achievement and enhance the accountability of the education system to parents**. This regulation also clarifies the role of school councils and establishes their **right to express views on ANY issues that are important to the parent community**.

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The Education Act, requires school boards and principals to solicit views from school councils and report back to school councils on any advice received.

School Councils may influence decisions affecting both students' education and schools themselves.

THE TDSB WEBSITE SAYS....

Equinox and the TDSB value learning environments that are safe, nurturing, positive and respectful. Equinox and the TDSB are committed to equitable and inclusive practice, and value the uniqueness and diversity of our students and community.

It encourages collaborative communities and cohesive partnerships with students, staff, parents and the community. Parent and community involvement is vital to ensure student success.

Next Angela read the following thank-you speech on behalf of the 2016-2017 School Council...

The 2016-2017 School Council Executive would like to thank you for letting us represent you the parent community at Equinox. It has been our honour and privilege. We have learned so much from the parents, students, teachers, school administration and staff. A special thanks to Jodi, Chris and Mark who took the time to guide our efforts this past year.

The School Council this past year was dedicated to clear, concise and timely communications through meetings, email, the website, blog, Facebook posts, handouts, posters and more. We believed those were key to ensuring strong parent, student and staff partnerships. Our council strived to inform and engage the Equinox community while encouraging greater involvement for ALL parents in their children's education.

In a community, as diverse and unique as ours, the School Council's goal was to give every parent's voice a safe space to be heard and respected. Last year we introduced online polls prior to voting to promote maximum parent engagement. Our second survey had 98 completed responses in a school with only 189 students which is amazing! There was also a grade 7/8 student led survey where 139 out of 149 grade 1 to 8 students participated. We are thrilled so many individual voices within the Equinox community were given the opportunity to be shared through the School Council forum last year.

Our council would like to thank the parents, students and staff for taking the time out of your busy schedules to share your thoughts, ideas and concerns. We appreciated and

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valued all of your different insights and shared them accordingly with the school administration.

Some of the School Council highlights from last year include:

1. Working with TDSB to get another teacher at Equinox to reduce class sizes and increasing our school enrolment from 189 to 200 students.
2. Better educating the parent community about TDSB's 2015-2016 new enrolment and wait list freezing processes for optional attendance schools. This information is also available on the website for parent reference.
3. Increased transparency and accountability for School Council fundraising by adhering to the Ontario Ministry of Education and TDSB regulations. Now all fundraising clearly states what it is raising funds for BEFORE they are raised. This allows those who are supporting the fundraiser to know exactly where their money is going in the school. Funds raised are then spent within one to two years so that the students and families who supported them may receive the benefits from them.
4. There were many amazing events, such as the Equinox Urban Campfire, Winter Fair, Equinox Winter Concert, Parent Social, Movie Nights, "A Holistic Approach to Education" Parent Workshop, Roden and Equinox Mental Health Workshops, Bake Sales, Thank You Teachers Breakfast, Welcome Back Coffee, Roden and Equinox Kids Clothing Exchange and more.
5. The Grants and Awards Committee researched and applied for many things and although they didn't win anything, it was amazing to see all the lovely things our parents, teachers and students had to say about one another and our school.
6. Thank you to the Indoor Air Quality Committee for getting our entire school building's carpet replaced with new bio tile floors this year. We will all breathe easier because of you.

Those are only a few of the amazing things our School Council worked on last year. Unfortunately, it would take us all night to cover them all. So, let's just say a BIG thank you to anyone and everyone who helped with the School Council last year.

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EXECUTIVE VOTE

No nomination forms were completed by any Equinox parents to be considered for the School Council Executive. So, Angela and Matt offered to Co-Chair again this year. The group voted and it was passed. Jillian offered to be Co-Treasurer again. It was voted and was passed.

Victoria L'Esperance offered to be the Co-Treasurer to understudy Jillian.

Erin Stoik offered to be Secretary on an ad-hoc basis. Angela agreed to take the meeting notes that night. One parent suggested the School Council ask at every meeting for one parent to step and to take notes so the role is less formal and shared.

The School Council is still looking for another Co-Treasurer to understudy Jillian this year and Co-Secretaries to allow for greater flexibility on how many meetings the parent volunteers need to attend. If anyone is interested, please email Chair@EquinoxSchool.ca.

EGG FUNDS

During the last June School Council meeting, the School Council wanted to vote to allocate the funds raised from the egg program between July to December to cover the three Cultural Performances (approx. \$1,400) that are hosted in the school gym for ALL Equinox students. The goal was that no student would have to pay-out-of-pocket to participate in these performances similar to this past 2016-2017 school year. Chris reminded the group that we may only vote to allocate the July to September egg funds because then it would be a new School Council year. The group voted and passed to allocate the July to September egg funds to the Cultural Performances with the understanding that this matter would be revisited in the new school year.

Since that June meeting, Boriana who started and runs the egg program has requested that all future egg funds be formally allocated to an ongoing "Legacy Fund." This was her original purpose for starting this program. A legacy project would be defined as **any project that would benefit the maximum number of students possible in any holistic educational experience**. If approved by the parent community, the egg funds would go automatically each month to the school. Those funds would then be administered directly by the school administration (i.e. Principal) and not the School Council. An end of year report would be provided to the School Council on how the funds were used to ensure transparency and accountability. This would streamline the legacy project funding process. It would make it easier for teachers to be able to develop and execute more holistic educational experiences for our students in the months and years to come at Equinox.

Cathy, the new Principal, spoke about one project the teachers are currently working on that would align well with this potential new Legacy Fund called [Children's Peace Theatre](#). This program would come into the school and work with students. Below is a quote taken from Children's Peace Theatre's website about them.

"...to co-create a culture of peace using an arts based, intergenerational and holistic approach that cultivates ecological, social and spiritual resilience with the individual and the community. We centre the voices of racialized communities and leverage our power in the arts sector to co-create imaginative solutions for equitable and fair futures for all."

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A formal vote will happen at the next **Wednesday, October 25th School Council meeting in the school library at 7:20 pm** on where the egg funds will be allocated.

MOVIE NIGHTS

The meeting attendees discussed hosting free movie nights with only free popcorn available and no food sales. The group all agreed the School Council should host more free family events this year; however, they felt that there may be better event ideas than the traditional school movie nights. It was noted by parents that at times it can be a struggle to enjoy a movie when the children want to play with their friends, and in today's age of on demand video, movies do not have the same draw as in the past.

A few ideas the group suggested was a family jamboree, show an adult movie and kid movie at the same time, drumming circle etc.

LORI'S CLASSROOM RELOCATION UPDATE

Lori's classroom was relocated to the library from the third-floor because the kindergarten students (3 to 5 years old) lost approx. an hour of learning time navigating the stairs to and from the third floor. Out of six kindergarten classrooms between Roden and Equinox, Lori's was previous the only one not on the main floor. Lori's kindergarten classroom still is the only one not with the rest of the kindergarten classrooms on the north side of the building.

Lori's class has 15 students; therefore, she has not been allocated an ECE. The library classroom has no visible bathroom access. The short-term solution provided by the school administration to this challenge is Lori has been given an aid for a short-period twice in the afternoon to take students to the bathrooms. Unfortunately, 3 to 5 year olds, many who are still new to being potty trained and have limited bladder control, often need to go to the bathroom in-between those periods.

Cathy explained a long-term solution is being worked on by TDSB. It will most likely involve construction because both Roden and Equinox are predicted to grow in enrollment in the upcoming years. The exact details of that plan are still in the works and will be confirmed in the next few weeks.

The School Council has since May has voiced health and safety concerns about Lori's classroom being relocated to the library and its lack of visible bathroom access. The council reasserted during this meeting that Lori should be given full-time ECE support until the long-term solution is completed and available. The health and safety of Equinox's should not be compromised while this situation is being resolved.

UPDATE: Good news! Since the council meeting, Lori has been assigned a contract full-time ECE to support her classroom.

TEACHER REP.

Cathy and Chris confirmed a teacher representative for the School Council will be finalized before the next October 25th meeting.

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OPEN FLOOR/CLOSING REMARKS

- At the next School Council meeting, all formal council meeting dates/times for this upcoming school year will be presented.
- The School Council confirmed that they plan on hosting another free kids clothing exchange this Spring with the Roden School Council because the fall event went so well. The Roden and Equinox School Councils are also in talks to host a toy exchange in November/December to provide gift giving alternatives during the holiday season.

JOINT RODEN/EQUINOX COUNCIL MEETING

- Lice Check – This Wednesday.
- Curriculum Night – On September 28th there will be a formal presentation in the gym then classroom visits. The Roden and Equinox School Councils will be selling pizza and baked goods to raise funds for the joint Nutrition Program.
- A Paediatric Clinic has opened up at Chester and is open to both Roden and Equinox students since we are located in the same school building.
- Extracurricular Activities:
 - Cross Country Running Club: Morning practices are open to everyone whether or not they want to attend the meets or not.
 - Read-Up Club: Starts tomorrow (Tuesday 3:30 pm – 4:30 pm) in the school library for both Roden and Equinox students in kindergarten to grade 3. Students must attend with a parent/caregiver. Chris asked Roden and Equinox School Councils each for \$200 to fund this program.
 - Grade 1-5 Karate Kids | Tuesdays | Lunch Hour
 - Gr 7-8 Indoor Sport with Police | Alternating Tuesdays | 3:30 pm -4:30 pm
 - Grade 7-8 Indoor Soccer | Alternative Tuesdays | 3:30 pm – 4:30
 - International Languages Cantonese/Spanish – Started today.
- Cultural Performances: BBoyism (break dancing) has been booked for February 6th for all Roden and Equinox students to see. Similar to past years, Chris would like to do a total of three Cultural Performances for the Roden and Equinox students.

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- Character assemblies are changing up, with more direct involvement from students, so parents are encouraged to come and watch. Thelma's Grade 4 students will prepare an assembly on Respect for the October assembly. There will be two performances in the day – primary and junior, plus a “dress rehearsal” for kindergartens to watch.
- We had a presentation from Rose Reisman regarding the lunch program through KidsLunch.ca. Roden and Equinox parents may order what they want when they want, and can cancel two-days prior to service. If a child is sick, parents may report it to KidsLunch.ca before 8 am the day of the service for a lunch credit. Roden/Equinox need a minimum average of 35 orders per day in order to run this program (including staff). Currently between the two schools have approx. 40 students interested in the service. We'll start with Tuesday and Thursday, adding more if demand is shown.

The company will offer some free meals if there is a high enough take-up in the schools. Councils may also be asked to sponsor some meals for those who could not otherwise afford it.