

SCHOOL COUNCIL MEETING
Cootes Paradise Elementary
 (Hybrid Meeting – School Library/Remote)

March 21, 2023

MINUTES

In Attendance in Person: Jennifer Hogan (Principal), Rosalee van Staalduinen (Chair), Sue Dumitru (Teacher Representative), Natalia Gonzalez (parent member), Kara Jessop (Home & School Representative), Lisa Feinberg (Secretary), Ashley Francis (parent member), Vanessa Alexander, Joe Oliver, Fuad Alier, and another parent.

In attendance via MS Teams: Anneli Thomson (Treasurer), Anna Trikoupis (parent member), Kathryn Wiersma (parent member), Heather Ricks (parent member), Lisa Moulden, Afika Davey, and Taous.

Regrets: Susanna Gojsic (Vice-Principal), Stan Visaticki (Vice-Chair), Shao-Pin Chu (parent member), and Lily Huang (parent member).

Agenda Item	Comments	Person Responsible
1. Welcome, Introductions, and Land Acknowledgment	Called to order at 5:36 p.m. with quorum. Ms. van Staalduinen presented the land acknowledgement. Ms. Jessop has an ongoing disclosure that she is an employee of the HWDSB.	Ms. van Staalduinen
2. Notice of Minutes	The Minutes for the January 10, 2023 meeting were previously circulated by email for review. Motion was made by Ms. van Staalduinen by email to approve the Minutes, seconded by Mr. Visaticki. Motion was approved on January 19 th by email.	Ms. van Staalduinen
3. Review and Approval of Agenda	The agenda for today’s meeting was posted online prior to the meeting and reviewed. Motion made by Ms. van Staalduinen to approve the Minutes, seconded by Ms. Gonzalez. Motion approved.	Ms. van Staalduinen
4. Business from Previous Meeting	a. Approved motion to create staff guidelines for funding requests Staff had requested guidelines for submitting funding requests to Home and School Association (“HSA”) and School Council (“SC”). SC drafted a document that was shared with HSA and Administration. HSA prepared a funding request form (complete with instructions), in consultation with	Ms. van Staalduinen

	Admin and SC. The funding request form has been finalized and sent to staff. This item no longer needs to carry over.	
	<p>b. Approved motion to allocate school council parent engagement funds to purchase agenda stickers and child minding services</p> <p>SC purchased stickers for this meeting and will do so again in May. SC engaged two educational assistants for child minding services for this meeting and will do so again for the May 2023 meeting. Please spread the word that child-care is provided during SC meetings, if childcare is an issue.</p>	Ms. van Staalduinen
	<p>c. Approved motion to draft a letter to SEAC in support of more EA support at Cootes Paradise Elementary School</p> <p>Ms. Feinberg engaged with parents and drafted a letter in consultation with SC members, Administration, and parents. On January 20th, Mr. Visaticki, Ms. Feinberg, and Ms. van Staalduinen met with Superintendent Gerry Smith, who indicated that he loved the advocacy and encouraged SC to send its letter to the Director of the Board and the Ministry of Education, with copies to PIC and SEAC, as we see fit.</p> <p>On February 12th, Ms. Feinberg made a motion by email, which was seconded by Ms. Thomson, “to approve the letter regarding a need for increased EA support and send it by email to the Ontario government and HWDSB, with copies to the persons identified as being Cc’d in the letter.” The motion was approved on February 17th, and the letter was emailed out that day. The letter was circulated to the parent community via School Messenger on February 21th. The letter is also attached to these Minutes.</p> <p>SC requested the needs assessment matrix the Board uses to allocate EA resources. This request was denied by the Board on the basis that it’s an internal tool, which is not available to the public. Ms. Feinberg will be making a Freedom of Information request. Ms. Alexander requested that the matrix be shared with SC, if obtained.</p> <p>A summary of the events and responses received is appended to these Minutes, including from Mike Palma, Chair of PIC; MPP Chandra Pasma; and MPP Sandy Shaw.</p> <p>SC members expressed disappointment that we have not yet heard back from the Board or the Ministry of Education. Ms. van Staalduinen will follow-up to request a reply.</p>	Ms. van Staalduinen

	<p>Ms. Jessop mentioned that HSA is engaged in parallel efforts and has shared the letter with other local HSA groups. Additionally, the HSA executive will be meeting with Board Chair, Dawn Danko.</p> <p>Ms. Wiersma raised the possibility of parents volunteering to support additional needs and Ms. Hogan stated that the parent volunteer would be allocated to support the entire class, but would be welcome in that capacity.</p>	
	<p>d. Approved motion to strike a subcommittee to organize a Talent Show at the school in collaboration with HSA and Admin</p> <p>The subcommittee has had several meetings. The deadline for video submissions was March 20th. The subcommittee received 50 videos with an excellent range of talent. They will be compiled into one larger video and played at the event. An EventBrite invite will be created to monitor whether we will meet the capacity of the space or need an overflow night. Administration has indicated that the video will also be played at the open house at the beginning of May.</p>	Ms. van Staalduinen
5. Chair’s Report	<p>Ms. van Staalduinen reported on the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. SC submitted a <i>Pro Grant</i> application, led by Ms. Wiersma in consultation with Ms. Jessop, Ms. van Staalduinen, and Administration, to have award winning author, Ann Douglas, to do an online presentation for our school community that will support parents. The grant was awarded to <i>Cootes Paradise School</i> and planning is now underway. Ms. van Staalduinen made a motion “to approve booking the event with Ann Douglas for May 25th, pending availability.” Ms. Jessop seconded the motion. Motion approved. b. Ms. van Staalduinen met with Administration and Ms. Jessop on January 23rd to discuss fundraising plans and priorities, map out the year, funding guidelines for staff, and Talent Night. Administration, SC, and HSA plan to meet again soon. c. Ms. van Staalduinen attended the HSA meeting on January 26th and present a SC report. d. “PIC Connects” is taking place at <i>Cootes Paradise Elementary</i> on April 4th from 6:30-8:30 pm. This is an opportunity for feedback and conversation and the entire school community is invited to attend. 	Ms. van Staalduinen
6. Treasurer’s Report	<p>Ms. Thomson reported on the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Engagement funds were used for child minding and stickers. 	Ms. Thomson

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. The HWDSB Parent Engagement Fund was originally \$500, of which \$87 is remaining (including the deduction of stickers and child minding services for May's SC meeting). c. Pita Pit is launching soon. d. There are a few more pizza days. e. The subcommittee is exploring possible 2023-2024 events and will present options at the May SC meeting. 	
7. Principal's Report	<p>Ms. Hogan reported on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The March PD day was a huge success – staff dissected the school plan and are adjusting to a January to January School Plan model. b. Staffing is already underway for the upcoming school year and will be communicated in April. c. EQAO testing is from May 10th-June 14th. 	Ms. Hogan
8. Fundraising Subcommittee's Report	<p>Ms. Thomson covered the update in her Treasurer's report.</p>	Ms. Thomson
9. Teacher Representative's Report	<p>Ms. Dumitru reported the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Grades 4 and 5 are doing a Board "We Speak" event, which is great training for oral communication skills. b. Grade 5 students have a year-end trip to McMaster, which they are excited about. c. All the Kindergarten classes have Grade 5 reading buddies. d. Primary grades are focusing on literacy, math, and "authentic community building." e. Kindergarten classes are going to the library. f. One class went to the sugar bush. g. Ongoing Professional Development for staff, including Jeanette Duchak, who focuses on literary building. h. Ms. Mackenzie indicated that Grade 5 basketball at lunch is completed. i. April 14th is the date for Jump Rope. The rain-date is April 17th. j. Mr. Campos ("Teacher Dave") is the new learning resource teacher and is welcomed into the School. 	Ms. Dumitru
10. Home and School Association's Report	<p>Ms. Jessop reported the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. HSA has received emails regarding the playground puddle in front of Cline Ave. North. Maureen Wilson, local councillor, has indicated that the City is not responsible for it. b. Popcorn day is going well and is offering two flavours. The event relies on parent volunteers - thanks to Joe for volunteering today. c. "Skate and Bake Sale" is April 1st from 1-4 pm at the Wentworth Arena – flyers are coming. 	Ms. Jessop

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. “Grow Too Fast Sale” (a parent-to-parent clothing sale) is being planned. Will partner with a class to make a PJ donation to McMaster Hospital to give back to community. e. Spirit Wear will be sold in conjunction with the School’s Open House in May. f. Silent Auction to take place at the end of May. g. Book swap to take place at the end of June. The plan is to set up a little library at the front of the School. h. People are encouraged to join HSA to ensure that the budget is allocated well to serve diverse community needs. i. Looking at creating an opportunity for families to connect with community services such as Centre for Diverse Learners and Balance Self Care Studios. j. Next meeting will be held virtually on March 29th at 7:00 p.m. 	
11. New Business	<p>a. School Pathway Maintenance</p> <p>An ongoing issue of icy entryways and paths around the School has been brought to SC. The question is how to address the situation in a sustainable manner moving forward, as it is not safe for staff or students.</p> <p>Facilities was invited to this meeting, but sent their regrets. School Trustee, Elizabeth Wong, was invited but was out of town and sent her regrets and asked to be sent the Minutes.</p> <p>Melanie McFee was to speak to the issue, but sent her regrets and suggestions via email. Ms. McFee suggested:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Including the front walkway in the contractor’s responsibilities as required on bad days. Ms. Hogan will speak with Facilities and report back at the May SC meeting. 2. Rerouting YMCA drop-off to the back parking lot entrance on bad days. Ms. Hogan will speak with YMCA and report back at the May SC meeting. 	Ms. van Staalduinen
12. Next Meeting Date	The next meeting of SC is scheduled to take place on May 16th at 5:30 p.m. – it will be hybrid (School Library/Remote). Please encourage parents to attend and remind them that child minding is available.	Ms. van Staalduinen
13. Adjournment	Motion made by Ms. van Staalduinen to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Gonzalez seconded the motion. Motion approved. Meeting adjourned at 6:44 p.m.	Ms. van Staalduinen

February 13, 2023

Hon. Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education, Ontario

via email to Stephen.Lecceco@pc.ola.org

Sheryl Robinson Petrazzini, Director
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

via email to director@hwdsb.on.ca
and lcarrrier@hwdsb.on.ca

Dear Minister Lecce and Ms. Robinson Petrazzini,

Re: Immediate Action Needed to Hire and Retain Educational Assistants

We are the parents of the children at Cootes Paradise Elementary School (the “School”) at the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (the “Board”).

Our children with additional needs are not getting the education they deserve. There are not enough Educational Assistants (“EAs”) to support their inclusion into our public education system. As you know, this is a longstanding issue Board-wide and province-wide. Unfortunately, in recent weeks, this issue has gotten worse rather than better. Just last week, on Friday, February 3, 2023, **several students with additional needs were effectively sent home from the School**, because EAs were absent and the School was not equipped to support their additional needs.¹ This has happened to students and their families several times this year but in the last few weeks, it is happening with increasing frequency.

We demand better for our children. There are three primary issues: 1. Insufficient Funding; 2. EAs Needed in Every Kindergarten Class; and 3. Transparent Contingency Plans Needed for Staff Absences.

¹ “Shortage of EAs at Hamilton elementary school means Sumi, 9, gets sent home,” Hamilton Spectator, February 7, 2023: <https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/2023/02/07/education-assistant-shortage-hwdsb.html>; “Hamilton father routinely drops everything to wait in van outside son’s school. This is why,” CTV News, February 9, 2023: <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/hamilton-father-routinely-drops-everything-to-wait-in-van-outside-son-s-school-this-is-why-1.6267837>

1. Insufficient Funding

There are insufficient EAs staffed in our classrooms. As a result, EAs struggle (through no fault of their own) to meet the basic feeding and toileting needs of children with additional needs. Without these basic needs met, children struggle to meet their individual education plans. We have spoken to families who tell us that their child in a wheelchair holds their bladder all day long to avoid asking their already overburdened EA for bathroom assistance. We have also spoken to families who tell us that their child with nonverbal autism is not able to fully participate in educational activities, because their EA is assisting two other children with additional needs. There is a lack of funding for EAs province wide. EAs are educated and hardworking professionals who need to be properly compensated by our Board for their work to attract and retain their talent.

2. EAs Needed in Every Kindergarten Class

Our Kindergarten classes in particular have struggled with the lack of EA support. Many Kindergarten students have not previously attended preschool. As such, in these classes, there are often children with feeding, toileting and other additional needs who have not been identified prior to the school year. At present, EAs are only allocated to classrooms with children who have already been identified as having documented additional needs. We have spoken to families whose children were not previously identified as having additional needs and are now struggling to participate in the classroom activities without EA support. In the view of the parents at the School, every Kindergarten classroom requires at least one EA to ensure that our children can fully participate.

3. Transparent Contingency Plans Needed for Staff Absences

Due to the lack of funding for EAs, many supply EA positions are unfilled in our Board. When EAs are sick, schools appear to scramble for a backup solution. Other times, administrators will step in to assist children with additional needs. In our School, there have been several instances, in which children with additional needs have been told that they cannot come to school that day, because their EA is sick and there is no one available to assist. Education is a right, not a privilege. Our children should not be sent home as a matter of course. Families need to know what schools will be doing when our EAs are sick. Transparent contingency plans are required; such plans should be Board-wide to ensure consistency.

Conclusion – Action Needed Immediately

You, our government, have promised us that “every child, irrespective of their **need** has the opportunity to achieve their highest potential.” You, our Board, have stated that every child has the right to attend school.

It is time to act on your promises. Invest in EAs. Hire enough of them. Pay them what they deserve. Mandate at least one EA per kindergarten classroom. Plan for contingencies.

We demand that you meet your commitment to us and more importantly, to our children.

Thank you for your attention to this letter, and we look forward to hearing from you with respect to the steps you are taking.

Yours truly,

School Council, Cootes Paradise Elementary School

cc. Sandy Shaw, MPP
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Letter Calling for Immediate Action to Hire and Retain Educational Assistants Summary of Events and Response

Summary of Events:

- The issue of a lack of Educational Assistants (EAs) at *Cootes Paradise Elementary School* was brought to *School Council (SC)* by parents and staff.
- A motion was passed by SC on November 15, 2023 to draft a letter in support of this issue.
- SC consulted with Administration and the parent community in drafting the letter.
- At the suggestion of Administration, SC connected with Superintendent Gerry Smith.
- SC met with Mr. Smith on January 20, 2023. He indicated that he loved the advocacy and suggested that SC send the letter to Director of Education, Sheryl Robinson Petrazzini and the Minister of Education. He also indicated that we could send it to the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) and the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), as SC saw fit.
- SC approved the final letter on February 17, 2023.
- SC sent the approved letter to those listed in the letter on February 17, 2023.
- The Cootes Paradise community was sent a copy of the letter on February 21, 2023, via School Messenger.

Responses Received:

- On February 25, 2023, SC received a response from Mike Palma, Chair of the PIC, indicating that PIC chairs across Ontario met that day with ministry staff and that our letter and the corresponding issues were raised during that meeting.
- On February 27, 2023, SC received a response from MPP Chandra Pasma's office, expressing thanks for raising the important issue of hiring and retaining Educational Assistants. The response indicated that MPP Pasma shares the concerns on the current state of education funding in Ontario and went on to share that MPP Pasma brought the issue directly to the Education Minister, echoing our calls that children in Ontario should have access to an Educational Assistant when they need one. MPP Pasma's office provided the following clips of question period: [here](#) and [here](#).
- On March 6, 2023, SC received a response from MPP Sandy Shaw's office indicating that MPP Shaw often uses her question period or member statement in the legislature to speak in favour of items like this. SC responded with encouragement for MPP Shaw to raise the issue in the legislature.