

DPAC Chair Report for October 5th, 2020

The last month has been extremely busy, primarily with doing a lot of advocacy work to ensure that parent's voices get a chance to speak at the district level and to ensure that the district engages with DPAC when decisions are made that will impact our children. As per our Facebook post that we put out on September 26th, the reorganization across approx 15 schools in the district came without us being aware of it (the FB post is attached at the end of this report for reference) and I called Tim Bennett, S57 Board Chair, directly that evening and had a long, open, raw and honest conversation with him about how such decisions being made without DPAC having input, being consulted or even aware was not appropriate. I also had a two and a half hour conversation with Superintendent Anita Richardson on the matter as well and feel that our concerns and issues have been heard by both the administration and board.

However, at the September 29th I did give the following address to the board:

"Tonight I am addressing you with more optimism than I had last week. Over the last while it has repeatedly felt as though parent's input and feedback has been an afterthought as this board made decisions. However as I stand here I believe I can say that we as the DPAC are hopeful a new path forward has been found after the open, honest and lengthy conversations we have had with senior administration and the board over the last couple of days. DPAC and PAC's are the legislated voice of parents - we have a legal duty and responsibility to ensure this voice is heard. Parents and PAC' have a unique perspective to offer this board and district, specifically we are the only ones that can offer a true view and understanding of how district decisions will impact families and children at the ground level. As the School Act states, the role of DPACs is to advise the board of education on any matter relating to education in their school district, to advocate for parental involvement in the education system and give input into the development of education policy.

Despite the chaos of the last couple of weeks, we stand here ready to work at improving the educational outcomes for all student's in our district. Tomorrow evening on September 30th DPAC will be hosting a virtual PAC information evening to support and engage our PAC's in understanding what their roles in today's environment will be, given the current circumstances and how DPAC and the district will support them in the upcoming and different school year. This being said, we know and believe that together we can improve student outcomes in this district if true collaboration, proactive engagement and open communication are extended forward by the board and district.

We have an extremely diverse district and parents are by far the largest stakeholder group in this district. I and DPAC have a responsibility and are accountable to these parents and PACs of this district to ensure their voices are heard - DPAC is their voice and will continue to be their voice to this district.

We as parents know our children best; we were their first teacher and now we entrust them to you. However, with entrusting them to you we also expect you to hear and trust our voice."

Since then we have received the following commitments from the district and board:

- Scheduled weekly meetings between senior district admin and DPAC exec to ensure that parent issues, concerns can be brought to the district in a timely manner to be addressed

- This will also allow for more timely updates to DPAC about potential or future changes and activities happening at the district that will impact parents, families and children
- DPAC will also have early access to communications coming out to the district and have the ability to provide feedback, edits or request clarification on them to ensure that communications are more parent/family friendly and clear
- If major organizational or ministry mandated changes are about to happen, DPAC will be notified by senior admin and the board chair and a meeting to discuss the why, what and implications will be scheduled so that we are able to advocate on behalf of PAC's, parents, families, children during the decision making processes

We feel confident that our and PAC's voices were heard and that the district will make a more concerted effort to engage with us in a more proactive manner moving forward. However, DPAC as always will continue our advocacy work and as such the feedback and engagement from PAC's and parents is something we continue to seek.

Moving forward, the work to be done at present is continue on working with the district as all the Policies are reviewed and updated, reviewing and updating our own DPAC policies and bylaws, and move to providing an online option for PACs to obtain FoodSafe for their members in addition to the ever ongoing COVID related policy and safety work that we are also a part of.

Andrea Beckett
 DPAC Chair
 October 4th, 2020

Facebook Post from September 26th, 2020

Also posted on our website here: <http://sd57dpac.ca/2020/09/dpac-advocacy/>

Dear parents and families of students,

We as the DPAC are so very deeply aware of how frustrating and difficult the start of the school year has been for you, especially this last week with the sudden and poorly communicated reorganization and loss of divisions at many schools throughout the district. Please be aware that DPAC was not engaged or notified of the restructuring by the school district board nor by the district senior administration. We found out about the division changes at approx. 15 schools in SD57 through the voices of our PAC's and via Facebook and after the decision had been made and carried out by the district, which was extremely upsetting to us. This lack of communication and engagement is not acceptable to us and we need you to know that our DPAC is continuing to advocate strongly and loudly for the needs and rights of students. As such we have escalated the return to school issues, including the recent reorganization, to BCCPAC as our provincial body.

DPACs are the legislated parent voice at the school

district level, representing the collective views of school Parents' Advisory Councils (PAC) in a school district. The role of DPAC's is to advise and engage with the board of education and district administration on any matter(s) relating to education in their school district. DPAC's advocate for parental involvement in the education system and give input into the development of education policy. However, if we as the DPAC are not aware of changes being considered or put forward by the school district we are unable to provide input, bring forward potential alternative options or advocate for parents and families in the district. There were other options that could have been brought to the table for discussion had we been engaged by the district, as is our legally defined role and right.

Please continue to send us your feedback, thoughts, suggestions, experiences as we continue to advocate vociferously on your behalf.

Please also ensure that every one of your emails or messages gets sent to the SD57 Board of Administration. Their contact information can be found on the SD57 website and is as follows:

Tim Bennett, Chair - Phone: 250-649-8316; Email: tbennett@sd57.bc.ca

Trent Derrick, Vice Chair - Phone: 778-675-6833; Email: tderrick@sd57.bc.ca

Betty Bekkering, Trustee - Phone: 250-960-9627; Email: bbekkering@sd57.bc.ca

Ron Polillo, Trustee - Phone: 250-612-9801; Email: rpolillo@sd57.bc.ca

Bob Thompson, Trustee - Phone: 1-778-258-0152; Email: bthompson@sd57.bc.ca

Shuirose Valimohamed, Trustee - Phone: 1-250-988-1648; Email: svalimohamed@sd57.bc.ca

Sharel Warrington, Trustee - Phone: 250-612-8352; Email: swarrington@sd57.bc.ca

We will share more information with you as we get it.

SD57 District Parent Advisory Executive/DPAC:

Andrea Beckett -Chair

Kim Pryschlak - Vice-Chair

Arlene McKibbin - Treasurer

Christa Porter - Director & Media Support

Amie Thibodeau - Director