

September 2021 DPAC Presentation to the Board of Trustee at the monthly  
Public Meeting of the Board of Education

Good evening trustees, and to all Rights holders & Stakeholders, and to the Ministry of Education Special Advisors.

I want to start by acknowledging that I am presenting to you tonight on the beautiful, unceded ancestral lands of the Lheidli T'enneh.

It is hard to believe that the last year and summer have passed so quickly; that we are already back into the start of another school year. While this school year has started with another wave of the pandemic in full swing and leadership disruptions our DPAC is continuing with our work of providing support and education to PACs and parents and working to empower and engage them in the educational journey of their children through advocacy.

This year our DPAC has decided to focus on and explore certain themes for each month of the school year and have lined these theme topics up with district work happening throughout the year. For September our theme is Advocacy and we have been discussing with parents what issues, challenges and barriers they have faced. I would also like to share with you some of what our DPAC has accomplished in the last month alone:

- Developed an annual DPAC work plan with focused goals, priorities and action items that has been communicated out to parents, and shared with Senior Administration
- Engaged with the Indigenous Education department and have provided our Constitution and Bylaws to them to review for colonialism and provide feedback
- Reviewed every single school website and did an audit of availability of school plans for each school to the public
- Also collected and are in the process of reviewing every single school supply list for every school and grade in District 57 from an equity lens

- Developed monthly surveys to better understand and engage parents about the issues important to them

However, we have one large piece of work that we stuck on but first I want to talk about truth and advocacy.

*Truth*: an actual state of a matter; an obvious, verified and indisputable fact  
*Advocacy*: helping people find their voice; true and effective advocacy involves a broad-based collaborative approach to problem solving; it is problem solving designed to protect the personal and legal rights of individuals so that they can have equality and dignity in their existence within society; it mean taking action to create positive change and helping give people accessible and meaningful ways to speak out about things that negatively affect them.

Advocacy has been described as "**speaking truth to power**" .....let that sink in, "**speaking truth to power**".

And here is the truth - this board does a horrible job of supporting and promoting advocacy.

Let me take a step back for a minute to explain and note some other truths.

1. Firstly you board guiding principles state: "are accountable to the families and communities we serve and respect their involvement"
  1. It also states "believe that all children can learn, achieve and succeed, and that **by working together with our employees, students, parents, and our communities**, we will enable our students to reach their greatest academic potential."
2. Second, another truth - bylaws belong to the board. In fact, it states it on your website and bylaws are listed as "Bylaws of the Board".
  1. Which means BYLAW NO. 4 "A bylaw to provide for an appeal procedure under Section 11 of the School Act" - a bylaw so

outdated it was last reviewed and amended in 2013 belongs to this board - it belongs to you. This outdated bylaw is supposed to provide a clear path, process and resources for parents and communities to advocate for their children.

DPAC represents the voices of the parents and community and supports them in ensuring their voices get heard. However this can't happen if there is no clear path, process, accountability or ownership for the advocacy process. For the last two years we have been stuck with a mix of old policies and procedures, draft policies and procedures, outdated processes and bylaws combined with a lack of ownership and responsibility of who owns what.

I want to take you back to last February when we as DPAC called an emergency meeting with the board and senior admin upon discovering the number of kids on modified days and not receiving a full day of education in our district.

From that meeting it was determined that one of the needed courses of action to be taken moving forward was to engage with BCCPAC and senior admin to better understand the process and advocacy struggles from a parents perspective. Unfortunately this engagement got put on hold due waiting on the release of the Special Advisors report and the subsequent publication of the report. However, when we went to re-engage and move this forward we got stuck.

So we asked - we asked senior administration "*How do we as DPAC get a conversation with the board to discuss this?*" and our direction from Senior Administration was to contact the board chair directly and cc the secretary treasurer - which we did.

So DPAC called the board in person on how to move this forward and was told "Policy 8310 would dictate how this process should be".

Sooo... we went back and relooked at Policy 8310 which led us to putting our request in writing to the board which we did.

Guess what the answer was?? It read "*Your request would normally go to the chair of Policy and Governance...place your request on the committee's agenda. The committee is the appropriate place to start this discussion.*"

I would like to make something very clear - we do not want to have an item added to the agenda of the Policy & Governance Committee. It is not what we asked or requested. You didn't hear us so I am asking again publicly. What we want it to re-envision what this process looks like and how it works for parents.

We don't want to go through this bylaw line by line with you, we don't want a meeting to dissect it in its current state - we want to improve the process for parents to engage with the system, to be able to advocate in a meaningful manner and have their voices and truth be heard.

I also need this board to hear me about this next uncomfortable truth: Parents have checked out. Many don't believe that they have any more choices or get any assistance long before the appeals process in its current state starts. So many parents have become so disillusioned and disenfranchised with the whole system before they ever even get to the appeals process. Most parents don't trust the school system, this district or this board. We want to change that - but we need you to do your part, to own your part and to actually engage with us. We want your words to match your actions.

Our DPAC is simply trying to engage with you, this board, in a meaningful conversation on what needs to be done to improve how parents engage with the system and this district, on how we can improve the ability for parents to advocate and remove barriers for them. Given how difficult it has been for me and our DPAC who have years of advocacy experience in SD57 - whose purpose is to know the system to empower parents to be able to advocate - to simply start a conversation on improving the advocacy process, I simply

cannot imagine what it must be like for parents needing to use the existing dispute resolution process which ends with an Appeal.

Thus in light of all these hard truths we as DPAC are formally and publicly asking this Board to officially meet with us, Senior Administration and the Ministry Special Advisors to develop a concrete plan for re-working Bylaw 4 and developing a real and meaningful bylaw that actually supports advocacy in all its forms in our district. We are also formally requesting that this Board officially reach out and invite BCCPAC and John Gaipman to assist our district in this work.

Our DPAC has developed a phenomenal working relationship with the Acting Superintendent and Senior Administration; it's open, engaged, collaborative and every week when we meet we see the progress coming out of our co-ordinated and engaged efforts. However sadly this is not something we can say of our relationship or work with this board.

So in closing, I have a question for this board - how do you hear from parents? How do you know what they need or what their issues and challenges are?

I can tell you the answer - through us...through the DPAC. But if you won't engage with us in a meaningful way, if words don't match actions, then nothing will change.

Andrea Beckett  
DPAC Chair