

Chair Report for November 2021 - SD57 DPAC

As we enter into our third month of school, into our second year of education in a global pandemic safety is an issue that continues to be on everyone's mind. Safety at school, safety at home, safety of our communities, families, and friends. Our personal safety in terms of mental health as parents has been tested, stretched, challenged, and then tested again and again. But what does safety really mean? It is a subject that comes up time and time again but as DPAC we realized we struggled to truly define it when discussing it and so in this coming month we are looking to our PACs and parents to help us understand what safety in our school communities is to them. So we hope that you will take the time to take our short monthly quiz and help learn and identify what safety looks like and means.

In the last month DPAC had a 1:1 in person meeting with the board of trustees to discuss Bylaw 4 - the Appeals process – and the issues related to it. We explained why the Bylaw was so important and provided several key recommendations for improving the bylaw itself, as well as the recommendation that the board authorize a working group that includes parents to undergo the work of looking at Bylaw 4 and any related policies, or missing support documentation that is needed. The Terms of Reference for the working group is currently being drafted by Senior Administration and DPAC has been asked to provide input.

We have also started looking at parent experiences with IEPs in the district, as this falls in line with all three of our key overarching priorities for this year as well as the new SD57 Strategic Plan. We also held a virtual PAC Executive Bootcamp in October as well as hosting a virtual live event featuring Ivan Coyote as part of our Inclusivity and Equality month. We are continuing to work with the district to get the questions surrounding babysitting at PAC meetings answered and clarified – currently we are the only district in the province where this is not supported by the school board and we are actively advocating for change to bring our district in line with the rest of the province.

In addition, we are as always involved in helping PACs and parents on a one-on-one and as needed basis whenever they reach out to us for support. We hope to be able to hold in in-person PAC Café sometime in the new year and are always open and excited to hear about any other ideas for education and empowerment from you our membership.

October 2021 DPAC Presentation to the SD57 Board of Trustees

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

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

We are already two months into the school year and already so much has happened. DPAC has been very busy supporting advocacy and organizing events for parents and PACS, such the virtual PAC Executive Bootcamp which we held on October 14th and the very exciting upcoming Ivan Coyote event this Thursday October 28th via Zoom. I know I have mentioned it before, but we are very excited at the opportunity to bring Ivan to present in our community due to their unique ability to share relatable and humorous accounts of their experiences growing up and traveling Canada: experiencing society while expressing themselves in ways that do not match society's expectations. We hope that board will join us for this exciting event on Thursday as Ivan stories always challenge you to re-evaluate your personal and world views in new and different ways.

The next upcoming month our topic of focus is safety - emotional, physical, physiological and environmental safety of our students in our school communities. As we saw from the Acting Superintendents report last September, there is significant work that needs to be done to improve how safe our children feel in their school communities.

As part of the upcoming work on safety in our school communities DPAC also looking forward to engaging with the board to determine the next steps from Traffic Town Hall last we hosted last June. While we realize that resources in our school district are stretched tight, we hope the this board is committed to developing a concrete plan and timeline on how to start addressing the safety concerns in our school communities. Student safety is an issue that we hear parents voice over and over again so we are asking you as the board to hear that this is an issue important to parents and work with us to put together a plan of action.

DPAC is would like thank you, this board, in meeting with us in person last week to actively and deeply discuss the work and steps that need happen in order to improve Bylaw 4. We identified four key areas of improvement that are needed for Bylaw 4, along with other recommendations for action. The motion to develop a working group and Terms of Reference that is on the Boards agenda tonight is greatly appreciated, it means you are listening and we are excited to see the work actually moving forward in a meaningful way. It is our hope that this engagement between you as the board and DPAC is just the start, and that moving forward more direct work and knowledge sharing will continue. Collaboratively we achieved a lot in one meeting on just one topic, so imagine what we could accomplish with this level of collaboration moving forward into the future?

We are also very much in support of the recommendation coming from the EPPC tonight on making SD57 presentations and supporting presentation materials available for the public. Additionally, the school ventilation document published and posted on SD57s website is a welcomed response to parents voiced questions and concerns. Both these pieces of work help to address the need for transparency from this district, which is an issue that DPAC has raised many times in the past - so for this we thank you as well.

In terms of the new Strategic Plan, it is also nice to see work moving forward, including the shared video and thought exchange platform that are currently happening. From the four key areas of the new Strategic Plan, Truth & Reconciliation, Equity & access, Wellness and Learning, DPAC is currently working on engaging with

parents on the Equity and Access aspect in order to get a better understanding of how parents perceive where we are at today and what they identify as critical barriers and opportunities being.

As we move further into the school year DPAC will, as always, continue work to actively bring the parent voice to this board. We will be vocal, we will be insistent, we will be direct and honest, and at I am sure at times we will make you as a board feel uncomfortable. That is because we are absolutely dedicated to changing the education experiences in this district for the better. Advocacy, the right to advocate and the ability to advocate - these are key to permanent, long-lasting positive change in our district and school communities.

So, in closing, this month I would like ask each of you on this board something - as we continue forward further into this school year, I ask you to truly and deeply reflect on what advocacy means to you both as a person and as a board, and how you can help improve advocacy with every piece of work that you undertake.

Thank you.

September 2021 DPAC Presentation to SD57 Board of Trustees

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 of the Lheidli T'enneh.

It 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 means 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"..... think about what that means, "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.

Firstly, your board guiding principles state: "are accountable to the families and communities we serve and respect their involvement"

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."

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".

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 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 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 parent's perspective. Unfortunately, this engagement got put on hold due to 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 what 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 do to 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 reaches out and invites 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 coordinated 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.