

April 2022 DPAC Chair Report

It is April, we are down to the last three months of the school year, it's budget season, pandemic restrictions are lifting and we are starting to move back towards interacting and working together in person. However, what the last two years have shown us is that the virtual world is also here to stay. As such, moving forward all our DPAC monthly meetings will be in a hybrid format with in person at Van Bien as well as being able to join via MSTeams virtual link.

March was a quiet month due to spring break, which was much needed for our DPAC executive after two years of heavy advocacy work during the pandemic. This coming month starts off with a series of Budget Consultation meetings with SD57 for the 2022-2023 budget as well as long term financial planning (as much as is possible in education). The Special Advisors final report and work plan for SD57 will be released soon. WE have continued work with SD57 to rebuild and redo the Appeals process and Bylaw 4; this work will be wrapping up soon and the new bylaw will be brought to the board to vote on and approve.

May is DPAC's Annual General Meeting (AGM) which elections for executive – all positions will be open for re-election or election and we hope that some more and new parents will be willing to step forward and works with us to represent their voices at the district level. April 30th to May 1st is also the BCCPAC Annual Parent Conference and AGM, where four of our directors will be attending and representing parent voices from our district, as well as attending a variety of sessions and bringing that knowledge back to our district to share with our PACs, parents and families.

DPAC presentation to the Board of Trustee's at the March 2022 Public Board Meeting

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.

Secondly, I want to acknowledge that today is International Women's Day - it is a day to celebrate and acknowledge the vast multitude of women across cultures, people, and the world. Today we celebrate and raise awareness of the powerful achievement's women have brought humanity when we acknowledge and actively promote their inclusivity and diversity.

Budget season is coming - the Provincial budget came out on February 22nd announcement and our district budget from the Ministry will be coming on March 15th. While we don't know what it will look like, we do know that education keeps getting asked to and needs to more with less...the demands of and pressures with our education systems and schools continues to grow. The resources required to support our students are ever increasing and keep growing year to year. At our monthly DPAC meeting on Monday Superintendent Cindy Heitman did an absolutely excellent job of proving our parents and PACs an overview of how school budgets work, how they are developed, how they fit into the local school plans, how those feed into our district strategic plan and into the Ministry Framework of Learning.

But while money, budgets and resources continue to plague our education (no pun intended), what I really want to talk about tonight is inclusion. Inclusion and equality - for you could throw all the money and resources in the world at our education system but if without some key foundational pieces, we won't see long term and sustainable change in our school communities. That foundation is an education system based on and providing education based on the values of inclusion, equality and valuing diversity.

Our district does an extremely poor job of inclusion, and what makes me so angry and frustrated is that we keep talking about inclusion, but we aren't actually doing it. If we look at our strategic plan, it is there but we need to change how this district does inclusion, we need to change from just saying it to actually living it every day - if we do that then we actually show what values we stand for as a district. It is one of our core strategic pillars, but our words don't match actions in our district.

I want to tell you a story that a PAC parent from our district brought to our DPAC about her son, who we will call Jack. Jack's mom was extremely upset, frustrated, and hurt with how Jack is getting treated in school. Jack has ADD, and like so many children he has trouble focusing. Jack doesn't "sit still" well for extended periods of time; he also struggles with emotional regulation (just like so many children and many adults as well). So, guess what happens? Jack gets sent to walk the hallway. Alone. In front of his peers, when he can't sit still, can't regulate his emotions, when he starts to "escalate" he gets sent out of the classroom and gets made to walk the hallways to calm down - to "self-regulate".

Now I want you to think about that image - imagine a child- imagine your child - walking in the school hallway alone. Imagine your kid alone in the hallway while all his peers get to keep working together in the classroom. Imagine if that were you. Imagine if you struggled with sitting for extended periods of time, like in a board meeting, and we made you go leave and walk the hallways to calm down. Imagine...imagine how you would feel.

Now what if we changed this experience? What if, instead of making a child walk alone and isolate them in their experience, we changed the story, the experience. What if we made it so that all the kids in the class participated in self-regulation activities versus just making Jack leave the room to walk the school alone. What if we didn't treat people differently? What if treated them as someone we could learn from?

It doesn't take much - it takes compassion. It takes curiosity and understanding. Compassion, curiosity, understanding and empathy - these are free...no cost, no money required.

Inclusion at its core is a philosophy - every single one of our students in our schools would do better and grow better if we actually modelled inclusivity in everything we do. You as a district make these children different through your actions - we have diversity, but you make those kids different than all the others by not truly embracing inclusion as philosophy at the core of education. "*Diversity is the mix. Inclusion is making the mix work.*" - powerful words by Andreas Tapia. Disallowing discriminatory practices is different from proactively encouraging diversity and inclusion. I will say that again - not discriminating is not the same as inclusion. Not being included literally hurts. Research has repeatedly shown that people process social exclusion like physical pain, and that is even more pronounced in children.

As we move forward with work on updating Policies in this district and how we provide education, there is great opportunity from change. Could you imagine if we as a community approached and undertook the policy

work around inclusion and equity the same way we are approaching the Bylaw 4 Appeals work? If we changed to seeing Inclusion as a philosophy, as an everyday way of being and living, rather than just words? After all, we know how much louder actions speak than words. What if, rather than making Jack go for a walk by himself to self-regulate, you had that whole class do 5 or even 10 minutes of physical exercise or yoga? Why aren't we giving the solution for one child to the whole class? What we do for the benefit of one child can benefit all - that is literally the reason and driving force behind the concept of inclusion. As a society we become better, do better and are better equipped to handle diversity when we teach inclusion by modelling it. You wonder why we have a problem with discrimination in this district? This is why - because we talk about inclusion, but we don't actually do it.

George Dei said, "Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space that is better for everyone."

So, in closing, as the challenge around how to use limited funds to make our education meet the needs of our students, I ask you as a board and as a district to rise to a different challenge - I challenge you make the community, our community, your community better by changing how we truly embrace the beautiful diversity in it.