

## **May 2022 DPAC Chair Report by Andrea Beckett**

On April 26<sup>th</sup> I gave the following presentation to the Board of Trustees at the monthly public board meeting:

Good evening trustees, and to all Rights holders & Stakeholders,

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

As we come close to the end of another school year, and a second educational year in the Covid pandemic, I want to talk to you about change. I really struggled in how to put together my thoughts and words tonight so I ask for your indulgence and patience. The reason I struggled is that tonight will be my last presentation to you as Chair of our SD57 DPAC. Our DPAC AGM is next month and my course as it's chair and leader has run its course - it is time for a new person to take the reins and lead on. It is time to let go. It is time for change. Perhaps I should be better emotionally and mentally prepared for this but also, perhaps, the reason I am not is that we have seen and been through so much change not only in these last two years but in the last 4 years since I stepped into this role that even more change is hard. Change fatigue - something that we are all experiencing and that none are immune to. So, I would like to take a moment and reflect on what we have achieved, and some of the changes that we have been privileged and challenged to be a part of in the last 4 years:

- Leadership within this district - Not only have we encountered changes in four different people filling the role of Superintendent but I also was privileged to witness several different iterations and evolutions of this board itself. While there were definite difficulties with finding the right people to take on the unique challenges facing our school district I would like to say that each and every person DPAC worked has taught us valuable lessons that we will continue to pass on. I know that this board will change again come fall but I also know and have the utmost confidence in Superintendent Heitman and her amazing team being able help to steer that transition and change in a positive manner.
- We increased our parent engagement, voices and participation tenfold throughout the last few years and despite the pandemic, we were able to continue to advocate and make sure that the parent voice was heard through technology. While the change in how we use technology in education and in our homes continues to evolve and grow, the challenges accompanying that change are equally daunting. However, it is also an opportunity and we need to continue to embrace this opportunity.
- Events we managed to host these last two years alone, despite the pandemic: we put on a Virtual PAC Café, hosted Ivan Coyote for their wonderful lessons on equality and inclusion, hosted a virtual Boot camp for PAC executive, hosted a Treasurer's boot camp, hosted a Food safe course, helped PACs move to an online and virtual way of being (including supporting, attending and facilitating many PAC meetings in the last couple of years), hosted a School Community Safety Town Hall.... The list goes on and I can't possibly include everything in my

few minutes but I do want to highlight the important work that DPAC has been and continues to be involved in across this district.

- We completely rebuilt Bylaw 4 - we worked collaboratively, as equals, in a circle and tonight you will see what is possible when all voices are heard and represented - the amazing change that is possible when we include parents and families as equal decision makers and voices at the table
- We are developing a Pac and Principals Handbook to help improve working relationships, knowledge and build best practices to support our school administrators and our school PACS and parents in being successful in improving their school communities.
- We are in the process of working with the Inclusive Education department to develop a Parent Handbook to provide better support, resources and guidance for some of our most vulnerable and at-risk families.

The last four years has had its challenges - from leadership changes, to district reviews and audits including the very brutally honest Special Advisors report and its fallout, a new curriculum, funding and budgeting challenges, re-evaluating what it means to have a safe family, a safe school, a safe community, masks, social distancing, staffing challenges, a growing district and capacity issues.... Nothing was immune to change it seems.

But what I learned is that despite the challenges, despite when we failed and when we screwed it up and when we got it wrong, despite the hard and painful parts, we came out better. We moved forward, we learned from our mistakes. By and large we changed for the better - our DPAC did, our PACs did, our school communities did. Our schools, our school communities, our education system are the key to creating meaningful and long-term change. "*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.*" -Nelson Mandela

But change requires listening. It requires honest open dialogue with all. It means actively working to listen, not to hear but to understand, people's experiences and challenges. It means coming together as equals to problem solve and develop unique and creative solutions that foster equality and inclusion. "*The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new*" -Socrates

Public education is the great equalizer - A public school system exists to nurture kids in the understanding that they live and will live together, regardless of differences of race, religion, economic circumstances, intellect, and all the other weird society applied differences. It all starts in the classrooms and with our school communities. "

Schools are places which are imbued with meaning - both shared and private. They act as conduits of ideas and practices within which cultural knowledge, norms, values, attitudes, and skills are passed from one generation to the next. As students, teachers, parents, and citizens, we invest schools with the responsibility for continually renewing (or perhaps transforming) the social fabric of society. For adults, schools hold the promise of a secure future life for our children. For students, schools also serve as formative sites where social roles and moral codes of conduct can be tested out and practiced. But

all of this only happens in the presence of active and involved school communities, not just the school buildings themselves. Parents, families - not just the students.

You have heard me talk about so many topics and issues over the last four years but if you only take away a handful, please take away these truths that will never change:

- Parent voices matter - We as parents were our children's first teachers, and will continue to be their most influential teachers - make sure parents' experiences and voices don't ever get lost
- Inclusion is one of the greatest challenges facing us as a society in the coming century - the key to tackling this challenge starts with how we model and foster inclusion in our school communities - this will require out of the box thinking, changing how we approach education, and NEVER forgetting that every single child has the right to an education, no matter what - we cannot ever turn children away or deny them a fundamental human right
- Actively engaging and bringing parent voices to the table is hard, it takes work, it requires dedication and breaking down barriers - but if you don't, you won't succeed, you won't create positive sustainable change....so make sure that at every meeting you look around the table, around the circle and ask yourself "where is the parent voice?"

I want to finish by saying thank you for listening, for working with DPAC despite the challenges and through the changes. Thank you for always picking up the phone, listening and hearing when I called. Thank you for rising to the challenges we have thrown at you. It has been an amazing journey and an honour to represent our parent voices for this district, to see the growth and the changes our school communities have undergone.