District School Council Minutes for November 2, 2015

1. **Welcome**

2. **Additions to the Agenda:**
   2.1. Refugees (under 11)
   2.2. Shout-out to teacher (under 12)
   2.3. School Cash Online (under 12)

3. **Approval of Agenda:**
   Moved by Hollie Tarasewich - approved.

4. **Approval of the Minutes:**
   Moved by Joy Morris - approved.

5. **Business Arising from the Minutes:**
   5.1. Constitution and Bylaws
   The District’s Policy Advisory Committee has on their agenda to create a District School Council regulation. This could serve some of the same purposes as creating a constitution and bylaws, as well as creating some structural clearness and continuity.
   
   5.2. Reporting Template
   There were slight modifications from the first version to the current version. Wilson suggested that we add a category for best practices (program, speaker, or other item at your school that has worked very well). Thanks were given for requesting feedback. A suggestion was made to change Event Highlights to School Highlights, to explicitly enable some items that don’t really fit under other categories.
   
   5.3. Topics for Professional Learning
   After reviewing the feedback forms filled out at the last meeting, Allison Pike and Cheryl Gilmore have scheduled presenters as listed in the agenda package. In response to a question about discussing the Town Hall question in advance, Cheryl said that this year’s town hall topic will be a vision and mission exercise, revisiting the vision and mission for the District.

6. **Trustee Report** - Keith Fowler reported: The Board held its organisational meeting on October 27. Mich Forster remains as Chair, Donna Hunt is now Vice-chair. Committee members are listed on the District web page.
   The provincial budget was also released on October 27. The government followed through on its commitments, and there were no surprises. Funding for capital projects also remains. The government has promised predictable funding for the next 3 years, but this remains to be seen.
   There was a presentation to the Board about the LCI dual-credit program with the university. There are two courses so far, and students receive high school and university credit.
   The Board had first reading on a Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Learning Environments (including sexual orientation and gender identity, safety, supervision, discipline, conduct on transit, use of physical restraint, searches, vandalism, alcohol, drugs, tobacco and e-cigs, and weapons). A parent asked about a government motion that has arisen in the Legislature, asking Boards to enable student representation on School Boards. Cheryl Gilmore and Keith Fowler said that the Minister had not discussed this with them. The topics addressed when the Minister met with Boards included bargaining, budget, and class composition. The District currently has a student advisory council who
provide feedback on policy. Any student can attend meetings as they are open to the public, and there is a 15-minute slot at 4:30 for anyone who comes and wants to speak to the Board. However, none of this is the same as a seat at the table.

A parent asked if the Board would entertain a stand-alone policy for LGBTQ issues. Keith Fowler said that there is significant support for the proposed policy, but if the Board were given a strong reason to use a different structure, they would presumably entertain it. Cheryl Gilmore said that pulling one piece out of this policy would require some careful crafting to ensure that Student Discipline and other consequences were still invoked, and that the harassment policy remains intact. The distinction between policy and procedure was discussed. Policy is used as a goal-setting framework; procedures provide the details of how the policy is implemented. Parent and student engagement is sometimes but not always solicited in the formation and revision of procedures. There was discussion of pros and cons of the proposed policy as opposed to a stand-alone policy. Some parents have expressed strong feelings in favour of a stand-alone policy.

7. **Alberta School Councils Association Report** – Allison Pike reported: Today ASCA and Alberta Education provided 3 sessions on understanding and interpreting results of Student Learning Assessments. These have been recorded and webinars will soon be available to be watched. There was also a previous webinar earlier this year on what SLAs are; this was also recorded and is available at http://www.albertaschoolcouncils.ca/events/event_details.asp?id=679844. Webinar Wednesdays continue to be provided and are all available through the ASCA web site. Provincial Achievement Test partners including ASCA met with the Minister, who indicated that there will be further discussions about PATs, so we should expect them to remain for the next few years.

On October 15 ASCA facilitated a session at our District building on Effective School Councils. Participants reported that it was enlightening, with good material and resources. They said that is extremely helpful for newcomers, but also for someone who has been involved in School Councils for over a decade.

8. **Committee Reports**

8.1. Policy Advisory Committee – see previous discussion about the Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Learning Environments policy. There will be a meeting on Wednesday.

8.2. Poverty Intervention Committee – haven’t met yet.

8.3. Healthy Schools Committee – no report.

8.4. Digital Citizenship Committee – haven’t met yet.

8.5. SAPDC – Allison is the ASCA representative, so another parent could represent District School Council. There will be two more meetings, in January and May. Emily Lynn volunteered. SAPDC has 12 sessions on SLAs available for teachers. They also provide training regarding literacy and numeracy for grade 6, and performance-based assessments. At the meeting, they showed videos about success stories featuring adaptations that were made to help students with disabilities. They also have training about career and technology education, starting at the grades 5-9 level.

8.6. Making Connections - there will be a meeting in November. The clothing exchange was very successful.
9. **District School Council Calendar of Events and Shared Opportunities:**

Cheryl passed along a question from communications staff: is there merit in having items under the parent section of school web sites on “how to get engaged,” providing links to provincial, district, and school-level information, in addition to listing individual school events that might be of interest to parents from other schools. This might encourage the practice of (electronic) communication between school councils about events of interest.

Parents responded supportively. It would bring parents in who wouldn’t otherwise look at the District web site. There was a suggestion that the District Facebook and Twitter accounts could be used to push events as well as have them available for those who seek them out (as opposed to simply reporting on them after the fact).

10. **Superintendent’s Report:**

Responding to concerns that had been raised about the difficulties of using the new system to email staff members, Cheryl reported that the reason for the new system is to reduce spam. The technical director is very reluctant to post teacher email addresses. Teachers when they respond should be using their email so that the parents have it after first contact. Parents said that spam filters block parent messages, especially from certain account types such as hotmail, but also reported that the tech guys can put in individual exceptions if requested. Parents should contact a school administrator if they have a problem. The new system is common to about 40 districts in Alberta. Cheryl will ask about the possibility of having a cc option in the web form.

**Provincial exam results:** Grade 3 students are taking Student Learning Assessments, and this is the 2nd year of the pilot program. Results are not being reported at the provincial level, nor at the district level because of the unproven nature of this assessment. For the same reason, the results are also not included in report cards. Grade 6 and grade 9 Provincial Achievement Test results are in, and have been presented to parents at many schools. The district-level report is available from the district web page.

In Grade 6 Language Arts, our district has slightly higher than the provincial average level of students who meet the “acceptable” standard. The levels have remained fairly steady at slightly higher than 90% (for the District and for the province) over the past 5 years. In math our district results were ahead of the provincial results for 2014 and 2015, but not for the previous 3 years. Province-wide slightly over 80% of students are meeting the “acceptable” standard; our district results have been as low as 74% in the past 5 years but are now over 80%. This is encouraging but is not clear evidence of a long-term improvement. It may be due to the teachers developing a better understanding of how to teach the new curriculum. These grade 6 students are the first cohort that has been under the new curriculum throughout their education. In Lethbridge, children’s numeracy skills are behind the provincial average even before they start school. Science results again showed over 80% of students meeting the “acceptable” standard; our district results have been as low as 74% in the past 5 years but are now over 80%. This is encouraging but is not clear evidence of a long-term improvement. It may be due to the teachers developing a better understanding of how to teach the new curriculum. These grade 6 students are the first cohort that has been under the new curriculum throughout their education. In Social Studies our district has been consistently getting a reasonably significant higher percentage of students meeting the “acceptable standard” than province-wide. French Immersion is broken out separately. The Grade 9 results are significantly poorer in general. In Language Arts our “acceptable” rates have been slightly below province every year except 2012 (with the provincial rates in the mid-80s). Individual schools have been working hard on this. In Math, our results are notably lower than the provincial level, and even the provincial level is in the low 70s (with our district in high 60s, so about
one-third of our grade 9 students don’t have an acceptable level of math). Improving this is a district goal, looking at grades 7, 8, and 9. Teachers across the district meet to talk about this at all levels. Parents asked how parents can learn to help their children more with math under the new curriculum? There have been school-based sessions for parents in the past, and these could be run again. A parent reported that one teacher posted videos about math techniques to help parents and students. In response to a question about whether the current grade 9 cohort’s poor math performance may be based partly on their relatively poor performance when they were in grade 6, Cheryl said that there is information available through the province, predicting how a particular cohort should perform on subsequent PATs, based on their results from previous PATs. Grade 9 Science district results were also below provincial results. French Immersion was again broken out, as for the grade 6 results. A parent asked how we are ensuring that the 35% of students who have unacceptable grade 9 math levels see significant improvement before leaving school? Cheryl said that teachers are looking at the specific test results to find where the students’ weaknesses are, and reviewing those areas. Since almost all of our grade 9 scores are below average, the district is working to revision middle school, and its structures. They are also looking at transition strategies for students moving from middle school to high school. They are considering time allocations for subjects in middle school. Are they at uninterrupted times of the day (with respect to other school activities)? A smaller percentage of class time is required on some of these core subjects at middle school than in grades 3-5 and even that is a reduction from the percentage required in grades 1-2. Is meeting the minimum time requirements enough?

A parent noted that teachers don’t send tests home because they want to be able to reuse them from year to year, so parents don’t see the results (nor do tutors, if parents hire them). This makes it difficult to pinpoint the problem areas and work on them.

At the Diploma level, our percentage of students meeting “acceptable” standards are mostly above or close to the province-wide levels, except in Math and Biology (and to a lesser extent, Physics). A parent noted that the city has asked for input how many refugees Lethbridge can accommodate, and where, and asked if the District had been invited to provide input or representation to the group looking into this. It has not. She then asked what does the District offer for refugees, and how might an influx of refugees impact workloads? Cheryl reported that there are programs at Wilson and at Winston Churchill for refugees who are under-educated or non-educated, but these may need to be expanded. The College recently dropped a program for Youth in Transition that had been used by students, because they felt that the District had this covered, but the District sees a gap. For students who aren’t going to get a high school diploma, we need school-to-workplace transition strategies for language, etc. At primary level, direct integration is most successful, along with intervention and support programs. Nepalese refugees grew up in camps and typically had lower level of education than we may anticipate this time.

11. Roundtable Reports:
A parent noted that the use of school cash online for hot lunch programs had been mentioned in more than one report. She asked about whether the district system could also be used to provide paperless order forms for menu items, so this could be connected directly to the payment. Keith Fowler said that Lakeview uses a program that provides a drag and drop menu option and pricing, and that Chris Gonsalvez would know more. Cheryl Gilmore said that General Stewart also has their
hot lunch program set up with school cash online. Some schools encourage parents to order (and pay) for whole year at once, at the start of the year. At Nicholas Sheran, they were having trouble getting parents to sign up for school cash online. To encourage them, they provided a discount on hot lunches for those who paid online.

A parent gave a shout-out to a math teacher at Gilbert Patterson. Some of his students came out of grade 5 with gaps in their understanding, and the teacher provided lots of extra help.

12. **Presentation – Healthy Active School Symposium for grade 4–8 students**

Lyndsey Spring is the Health Promotion Coordinator from Alberta Health Services who works with our district (and Livingstone). They provide “train the trainer,” not classroom-level education about health issues, and connect schools with resources and funding opportunities. They are planning a Healthy Active School Symposium ([www.everactive.org/hass](http://www.everactive.org/hass)). They do this in partnership with Ever-Active Schools. Last year it was for high schools only; this year it is for grades 4-8 students. Schools send teams of 8-10 people, including both students and some adult representation. The event will be on February 9 at Victory Church, and is being planned by representatives from 5 local school districts. A focus is on encouraging the students to figure out ways of promoting mental health. The students attend sessions about mental health, resiliency, etc., and then have an afternoon planning session about what initiatives might work best in their own school, while the adults have a separate session about how to support the student team. There is a fee of $123.81 for each team, and a subsidy available to cover 1 teacher sub + mileage. Parents are welcome as part of a team, or to attend the afternoon meeting. The schedule will be from 9:45-2:30, allowing time for bussing from rural areas.

A parent asked if the Health Promotion Coordinators might be able to advise parents on how to support students’ mental health? The answer was that it might be possible to arrange such a session.

13. **Adjournment.**