

Gordon Elementary PAC meeting
Minutes November 24 2008

Attendees: Ingrid Sulston, Elke Porter (secretary), Zol Fox, Jenny Scott, Heather Young, Margaret Davidson (principal), Noreen Morris (vice-principal), Ramona LeBlanc, Reuben Ford, Debra Kopelow, Kristine Chapman, Tricia Wallace, Anna Johnson, Jennifer Sears, Charlotte French, Colleen Kern, Blair Lockhart, Dan Graves (teacher), Mary Locke (teacher librarian)

1. Minutes of last month's meeting approved: Heather Young motion, Elke Porter seconded

2. Quick Business.

- a) Lantern Festival (Elke Porter). Call for BBQ's and BBQ attendants, sign-up sheets in the main hallway - several people volunteered their BBQ's. Wednesday afternoon art class for lantern making, or 5pm on Friday. Will also have glass jar tea light decorations, giant St. Martin horse.
- b) Holiday donations (Jenny Scott). We will not be donating to MacDonald Elementary, as there are donations to be made in our own community. We will be donating to the food bank and the Christmas Bureau. Teen/preteen items are needed – toiletries, make-up, nylons (new) for the Christmas Bureau, or non-perishable food item//cash for the food bank
- c) No Feb Scholastic – other ideas for something during parent teacher conferences – we need a volunteer to run with an event.
- d) Mandarin immersion classes at Gordon – Linda Shaw – 4figleaf@gmail.com – contact her for more information (twice a week)
- e) Ideas for sex education for the spring – Jane McDougal is setting up speakers. Ideas for sex education or other speakers to Jane or Ingrid Sulston. We could also sponsor classes for the students, as well as a speaker for parents.
- f) Movie night – feedback – Kids are having a tough time listening to the movie due to the noise and a group of kids went into the girls bathroom, ripped off the back of the toilet and they also called 911. More successful might be a K to 3 or a “younger” movie. Movie could be decided by committee or together in a PAC Meeting. Keep movie night for younger children & offer older children an opportunity to volunteer – sell popcorn – or arrange another event for them such as a games night.

3. FSA Testing (discussion with Dan Graves). It will affect everyone – takes place in February. FSA stands for “Foundation Skills Assessment” and is across all of BC. It replaces PLAP – Provincial Learning Assessment Program, which made random assessments, looked at the curriculum and how the learning worked and was a tool used in the last 15 years. About 10 years ago it was mandated to test every Grade 4 and Grade 7 student. Province gathers the information and then puts it on a rating scale – larger districts like Surrey/Vancouver you can see statistically growth or decline (good tool on a large scale) Parents are also given a “Satisfaction Survey” – on bullying, curriculum.

ADVANTAGES – gives children a chance to practice writing a test – they write math, reading, writing etc. it is like a practice test

DISADVANTAGES – results are skewed – not as accurate as they could be, lead to “teaching for the test”, and possible loss of funding for untested subject areas.

QUESTION – what happens with the information and where does it go? Ministry of Education says officially they use it to see how useful the curriculum is to BC Students; Teachers are saying PLAP was testing done on a random basis and was less prohibitive financially. Fraser Institute uses test results.

QUESTION: Why are we testing every student in Grades 4 and 7? And test is only math, reading, writing.

QUESTION: what is NOT being assessed that should be in the test? Fine arts, social studies, sports. Concern that topics such as social responsibility, arts not in the test might lose funding from the Ministry.

QUESTION: Does the data change anything? Fraser Institute uses the public information from the test and rates the schools according to their own criteria. Fraser Institute has access to media and they take information from some students who may have had a bad day and written a “bad test”.

QUESTION: How long has the FSA been in place? 5 years province-wide;

COMMENT: Private schools rank at the top because they teach to the FSA, they might send poor students home that day; you also have to write a test to get into private school – it seems to be against public education.

QUESTION – Is the Fraser Institute the Villian? – there are 5/6 categories not mentioned, such as ESL, special needs, yet there are exemptions.

HIGH STAKES – we are going to be “testing to the test” – that is what is happening in the States – this harms the children

COMMENT: It is bad evidence – they are making judgement and putting something out into the discourse that is not a well-designed tool

FEEDBACK – what curriculum changes have occurred or what funding has been taken away, due to the test – The test does make recommendations.

You can see a trend over time provincially – how are they categorizing & standardizing this test to completely different pockets of the population.

Math/Language Arts Curriculum has been revised and this may have happened from feedback from the test.

Spend too much time/money on this test for this tool.

Two opposite factions in the school and the students/teachers/parents were somewhat divided on this issue – school should come to an agreement and not be disruptive.

Provincially mandated test, but parents might opt out. In the past 2001 to 2005 there was a school board opinion that the parents could opt out. 2005 to 2008 the School Board gave the direction to not accept letters from parents to opt out. All current COPE and Vision School Board members (before they were elected) said they didn’t want to keep the FSA test in place.

COMMENT: Daughter in Grade 4 was too filled with anxiety to write the test, and it was spread out over 3-4 days, and it took time out from their regular curriculum; children should be left out of the the discussion.

If you felt the report card didn’t reflect the accurate assessment of their child – most parents feel the report cards are working.

QUESTION: Is the FSA a standardized test, like the provincial exams? – Yes, it is the same, except what is done with the results.

COMMENT: The Fraser Institute believes in private schools and does not like the public school systems

QUESTION: Why does the Fraser Institute skew the information – they have the media attention

QUESTION: Who writes the actual test? The test is written by people who are hired by the provincial government and are based on the BC Curriculum. Teachers.

The test is based on standards – is this different than the mini school test? Noone sure.

COMMENT: Kids should be included in the discussion about the tests, as it is part of their life.

Dan Graves – we need to speak out to parents and this was a big discussion as they were not allowed to speak at first, but then the school board relented and realized that they violated the teachers right to speak on this issue – it is a professional responsibility of teachers to speak out on the public education system.

COMMENT: One son wanted to write the test and they discussed it at home and came up with pros/cons.

COMMENT: child in grade 4; not age-appropriate to see placards, teachers reaching parents in the playground.

Margaret Davidson: Children should not be penalized for wanting to write the test and still might believe everything that their teacher tells them.

CONCERN: Sign said “Testing Equals Anxiety” – fear-based signs that children can read – it scares them into not wanting to write the test.

Teachers might communicate with a letter home to parents instead.

A parent says that the kids should not be used as a political pawns.

Both sides are very dug in.

This discussion will be held at another occasion – January meeting, or Feb parent teacher conference. Margaret can send a letter home; this should be a concern for everyone, not just Grade 4 and Grade 7 and should be discussed at all levels.

4. VOTE in new SPC Committee – Margaret got to show a “Smart Board” to show SPC information. SPC has the purpose to contribute to the growth/development of the school – consists of the Principal, Vice-Principal, and at least 3 parents – put together surveys/parents. Goals are literacy and social responsibility. Parents voted in: Jan Hare, Jennifer Sears, Ingrid Sulston, Ramona LeBlanc – show of hands showed approval, except for one abstaining.

5. Direct Drive Campaign – teachers gave a wish list and the items are listed on the list – all teachers eventually want smartboards. Mary & Carl got the first 2 smartboards. Miles, Robin, Frederic wanted. The School Board is getting the best deal, and one parent, Zol Fox suggested finding some local community sponsors.

Smartboard – use it as a white board, (prints out), webcat (www.webcat.vsb.bc.ca) – go to World Book, can take notes together, you can cut and paste etc. Very powerful teaching tool – children can watch videos, and then discuss what they see, make notes on the same board.

Suggestion: we should buy the items on the wish list and then come up with a separate committee to raise funds for smart boards. Where is the fundraising committee?

Teacher Wishlist Discussion: approve \$500 for rainy day games & playground equipment. Ingrid Sulston made a motion, Charlotte French seconded

Approving all the items in “Gaming Funding” – make a motion tonight to approve and the; Video cameras would be used for the whole school, curriculum, enhancement to the curriculum,

Make a motion: Approve everything in the Gaming section (author visits and fine arts and music presentations already approved). Jennifer makes a motion to approve the uniforms & Tricia seconded. The badminton rackets are approved by Charlotte & Ramona. Margaret will look at the Excel file and prioritize what the school needs. Parents will continue to look for donations.

6. Lice Checking – Charlotte French talks about the committee of 5-6 parents that are working hard to combat lice. The main item is awareness & checking for lice every single week. There should be a lice-awareness week towards the end of January. There has been a lot of discussion of being able to check every head in the school. People feel good/bad about doing it. Cons: stigma, people not treating it anyway, time, effort, manpower, confidentiality issues; Pros – suddenly everyone was very interested in dealing with lice – everyone was checked.

Charlotte is asking for feedback: This year the lice issue is more prevalent – 15 years ago it was a big year for lice; Lice goes from head to head or hat, or pillow, hair to hair,

Lice is very contagious – children hug, work in groups, push past each other

Lice eat blood & dead skin – parasite that perpetuates itself; JKC share hats, Margaret has mentioned it, and parents have talked to JKC.

FEEDBACK – make a “lice line” – it is about personal education and family education; have contact, person to person contact. Mary make a display, books in the library. 3 weeks where all kids wear hats to stop the spread of lice. Translations offered to parents who are ESL, one parent suggested mass checking, the public should be aware; let’s check every head – stay tuned... more will be coming

There would be a committee of 15 parents who would check the heads – notice would go home with slip on the bottom to approve checking or not.

Meeting adjourned 9pm