

Hillcrest High School Council Meeting Minutes

September 28th 2022

7:00-8:30 PM

Attendance:

Kate Connolly, Co-Chair, Andrew Wigston, Co-Chair, Janet Mark Wallace, Secretary, Dinu Chande, Principal, Neerja Malhotra, Vice Principal, Marilyn McMillan, Staff Rep, Alex Belgrave, Co-President of Student Council, Akash Karunaharan, Past Chair of Student Council, Reg Lavergne, Superintendent of Instruction, OCDSB, Christine Dalglish, Drew Collins, Ella Krupka, Gillian Dennett, Josie Sirna, Lily Gallinger, Lisa Phelan, Michelle Simms, Tori Moore, Valerie Edgecombe, Jenny Dzellis, Rob Oickle, Colleen Shanahan, Louise Doherty.

Regrets: Carolyn Kropp, Treasurer, Youssef El-Khatib, Co-President of Student Council, Rebecca Doherty, Student Senator

Call to Order

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledged that we are meeting on unceded and unsundered Algonquin territory.

Introductions

Since there were many people on the call, and the agenda quite heavy, introductions were limited to those who gave a report at the meeting.

Approval of Agenda:

Moved by Andrew, seconded by Kate, to approve the agenda for the September 22nd 2022 meeting. Carried.

Approval of Minutes from June 22nd 2022

Moved by Kate, seconded by Andrew, to approved the minutes of June 22nd 2022. Carried.

Student Report: Student Rep, Co-President(s) and/or Student Senator

Akash Karunaharan, past co-president from 2021-22, introduced Alex Belgrave, one of the two new co-presidents for this school year. The other co-president, Youssef El-Khatib, was unable to attend tonight as he was not feeling well. The student report usually includes a report from the Student Senator as well as the Co-Presidents.

Alex reported that the school had a Spirit Week last week, where students were encouraged to wear the school colours, and a Bake Sale was held on Friday. Today, September 28th, Student Council hosted a Gratitude Wall, where students were invited to post things that they are grateful for, and the wall had filled up by the end of the day.

Three weeks ago the school held its first assembly, and included introductions of the new Principal and Vice Principal, the Guidance Councillors and leaders of Student Council.

One goal of Student Council this year is to work in better unison with the LINK Crew, to avoid duplication, and better define roles. LINK is a class taken for credit, whereas Student Council is purely voluntary. Both provide opportunities for students to take on a leadership role at the school.

One issue that has been brought to the attention of Student Council is that the #649 bus, that runs between Greenboro Transit Station and Hillcrest, has been reduced to one bus in the morning. There are still two buses in the afternoon, but the second one is running later than it did last year. We may need to make inquiries into whether the service has been changed from last year.

Question: Is there a web site for Student Council?

Answer: No, there is at the moment no separate web site for Student Council.

Question: Are there representatives for each grade on Student Council?

Answer: Yes, there are positions for each grade, but at the moment we are lacking a representative for Grade Eleven. Candidates are invited to step forward for this role.

Question: How are students informed of the activities of Student Council?

Answer: PA announcements, posters in the school, and social media.

Principal Report:

School Council had invited Reg Lavergne, the Superintendent of Instruction for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, to attend our meeting and answer questions that had been sent on behalf of the parent population of Hillcrest. Reg was happy to accept the invitation, and in fact was once principal of Hillcrest, and is always glad to come back to his old school.

Q 1. Which parties, within and outside the school, were consulted last June about the continuation of the Principal at Hillcrest? Have any of the allegations be traceable back to students currently enrolled at Hillcrest? What percentage of the complainants remain anonymous?

A: Reg: The decision regarding the future of the Principal was taken in the best interests of everyone involved. A series of discussions took place between Reg and Brett Reynolds, the OCDSB Associate Director of Education. The decision was not taken lightly.

Q2. What is the Board and School's policy on tolerating school violence? To whom do students report incidents of violence? Are there consequences to violence, and are the consequences made clear to students?

A: Reg: The OCDSB aims to cultivate an environment that is both safe and inclusive for parents and staff. In the event of a violent incident, there are procedures and policies to follow, including the possibility of suspension or expulsion. Every incident is treated uniquely. The first step is to talk to the students involved about what happened and to come up with a plan to better ensure safety. If a student is involved in a violent altercation, many factors are taken into account, regarding the students' history and learning profile. The array of consequences can involve safety plans, social or psychological support, or in rare cases, expulsion. The voice of the victim is important in determining the consequences. More information is available on the Board web site.

A: Dinu: Prevention is paramount. The better the staff know the students, the less likely that these situations will escalate.

Q: A student from Gloucester High School was recently attacked by four other students. Do schools need a better relationship with the police?

A: Board staff cannot speak about specific situations when they are under investigation. In such a scenario, a safety plan for a victim could involve perpetrators not being permitted in some parts of the school. This would involve consultation with the victim to find out how to keep them safe and make them feel comfortable at school. We also want to provide opportunity for the perpetrators to make better choices. The environment must be safe for everyone before the perpetrator can return to school. Sometimes two returning students must commit to not associating with each other at all at school.

Q: How do these incidents get reported to the rest of the school population?

A: Reg: Usually the safety plan is worked out between the victim and the perpetrator. The rest of the school population is not usually brought into the discussion.

If the police are called in, they do their own investigation and the school has no say in how this is conducted.

Comment from parent: At the Elementary level, schools often use principles of restorative justice, where the perpetrator and the victim together come up with a plan to not repeat the ongoing problem.

A: Dinu: This is a good approach to the problem but requires cooperation of both sides.

Q 3. What is the policy for permitting vaping in the school washrooms?

A: Vaping is not supported at school and can only take place off of school property. The administration is aware that vaping is going on in the bathrooms and is trying to dissuade this

behavior, encourage healthier choices and connect students with cessation programs as needed. An educative approach informs students where they can go to vape if they feel that they must. Communication with students is key.

Q: Some students feel that the washrooms are always full of students just hanging out. Could the main doors be propped open so that it is easier for staff to verify that washrooms are being used for their intended purpose?

A: Dinu: We can look at this possibility. Students should definitely have access to the washrooms without having to go through big groups vaping in the washroom. Dinu has been doing regular checks of the boys' bathroom and thinks that there has been an improvement to the situation. Neerja will be following up to ensure that the girls' washroom is used for its intended purpose.

Q: In Elementary schools, boys and girls are now permitted to use each other's washrooms and this is why the main doors have been removed. Is this being discussed at the High School level?

A: Dinu: This has not come up yet at Hillcrest or any other schools he's been at. There is a gender neutral washroom available for student use. Students must be provided the option to the washroom which matches their gender identity.

Q4. Does the Board have a plan to try to increase the population of the school, and if not, what are the plans for Hillcrest as population declines?

A: Reg: Eligibility to attend Hillcrest is based on where students reside. The population has been stable for the last few years. Principals try to collaborate with one another to ensure that students have access to the courses that they need. Some approaches could involve combining classes, offering classes only every second year, or e-learning. There are advantages and disadvantages involved in being a small school or a large school.

In Reg's era at Hillcrest, the population was declining but they were still able to offer an array of courses. He will be working this year to ensure that Hillcrest continues to be able to offer as much choice as possible. The population this year is 463.

Q: How do e-learning course options get communicated and what is the process for enrollment?

A: Jamie Bell, the Guidance Counselor, will be invited to join a future School Council meeting, and will be able to provide more information on this question. Most e-learning course enrollment would take place in the spring, when students do their course selection, and this past spring Ms Bell was on maternity leave and neither Dinu nor Vice Principal Neerja Malhotra had yet started working at Hillcrest. Next year we hope that the option of e-learning courses will be communicated in plenty of time.

Reg added that this year there will be a virtual parent/student information night in December for Grade Eight students headed to high school next year. It will include information on e-learning,

there will be translation services available, and there will be break-out rooms where people can discuss their questions.

Q5. How do we keep a variety of courses on offer in the context of declining enrollment?

A: Reg: The Board is committed to maximizing student learning experience regardless of the size of the school. Sometimes students can take courses at both Hillcrest and Canterbury but this would depend on specific circumstances.

Q: Can you attend a school if you don't live within its boundaries?

A: Students can apply to transfer to another school but the decision is based on course availability at the two schools. There are no plans to change this policy.

Q: Will there be mandatory end-of-year exams this year?

A: Dinu: Schools will be given some choice this year as to how to conduct evaluations. This is a conversation we should pursue at a future School Council meeting.

Q6. Has a survey of students been done for Hillcrest? Will there be a survey for parents? How can we access the results?

A: A Student Climate Survey was conducted last year, and surveys were also done about students' experience of Covid. Schools have access to results, and we can bring this to a future Council meeting.

Q7. Who are the advocacy organizations who are helping to define Board policy with regard to gender ideology, race relations and involvement of police in schools? Is this information available to parents?

Human Rights Law guide Board policy, and other groups and individuals are invited to participate in the process.

Q: Do we have data on the ethnic origins of students at the school? How can we make sure that all students feel safe at school regardless of what they look like?

A: Reg: Hillcrest has been actively committed for many years in trying to ensure that everyone is welcome at school regardless of country of origin, race or ethnicity. There is a Human Rights Investigation underway documenting the allegations made at Hillcrest in June of 2022. The report will remain confidential and will not be shared. However can bring a summary of next steps forward to a future School Council meeting.

Hillcrest works with many community partners to help bridge barriers that may exist between schools and minority communities. The goal is to have every student feel that they belong at school. We would like ongoing input from families and students.

Q 8. Are students in the graduating class permitted to fundraise for grad activities on school grounds?

A: Yes, fundraising can take place for grad events that are organized by the school. Vice Principal Neerja Malhotra helped to organize such a grad event for Brookfield High School last June, which took place at the Infinity Centre. Tickets were \$60 and almost the entire grad class attended. The school was able to provide subsidies for students in financial difficulty.

However, events organized by Prom.com or other outside companies are not associated with the school and therefore the Board does not allow fundraising to take place for these events on school grounds.

Q: Did Hillcrest not fundraise on school property for grad in the past two years?

A: It is possible that individual students or families initiated their own fundraising efforts in the past two years, but no fundraising events took place on the school grounds, due to Covid restrictions.

Q: Could we form a sub-committee of School Council to further discuss options for grad events?

A: Yes, we certainly could. Last year School Council participation was minimal but we welcome more activity this year.

Q 9. A neighbour of Hillcrest has inquired about dismantling the chain-link fence on the east side of the south parking lot. We've had other questions about superfluous fencing impeding pedestrian access to the school. Who has the authority to make decisions about school fencing, and how do we as council address this authority?

A: This question will be deferred to a subsequent meeting

Open House: Dinu Chande

Today, September 28th, Hillcrest held its first Open House in three years. The idea was to welcome in as many families as possible and to reimagine the possibilities of school life in the wake of two very unusual Covid years. Information was translated into Arabic and Somali to try to provide information to as many families as possible. The School Spirit was palpable and clearly we are off to a great year at Hillcrest.

Green Report: Janet Mark Wallace

Following Hillcrest's application last spring for ten mature trees to be planted at the northeast corner of the school, (Smyth and Dauphin), Heather Pelz, the Landscape Architect with the city's Schoolyard Tree Planting Program, has set a date of Friday October 21st 12:45 to come and look at the space and make recommendations. The STPP provides the trees and does the plantings, and it is the responsibility of the school to keep them watered through the first three summers. Student Council has agreed to publicize the watering job as an opportunity to earn volunteer

hours. The principal, vice-principal and head custodian will help determine the location of the trees. The Foods teacher, Mr Duncan, and the Outdoor Education and Indigenous Studies teacher, Jenny Kirin, will be consulted as to which type of tree we request.

There are four veg gardens at the front of the school, located next to a hose bib. Two meetings have taken place on Friday at lunch hour, with Alex, Youssef, Akash, Shom, Dinu, Neerja and the Foods teacher, Mr Duncan, to advise on how they see the garden developing this year. We agreed to put in two composters and to try to fill them with as much yard waste as possible through the fall. We could also collect coffee grounds from inside the building during the winter months. We can plant some perennial herbs and garlic in October and generally get the area weeded and tidy for spring. Meeting times will remain Friday lunch hour though the fall, as long as weather permits.

Emmanuella Longdon, a Grade Nine student on Student Council, has agreed to be the point person for the school garden. She has many years of gardening experience and helped to grow 150 kilograms of food this summer in the St Thomas the Apostle Community Garden.

Many other greening initiatives are taking place through the ward, and all offer opportunities for students to earn volunteer hours while being outdoors and meeting new people. For more information, contact janetmarkwallace@gmail.com at any time.

Treasurer's Report

There has been no activity in the School Council Account since we last held a meeting in June. The balance is at \$745.84.

Staff Report

Staff Representative Marilyn McMillan will be asking the Guidance Department for a report for the October meeting.

Today a group of 45 Hillcrest students attended a Survivors' Gathering at Lebreton Flats, to hear Aboriginal Elders speak about the tragic legacy of Canada's Residential School system. On Friday September 30th the country will mark the second annual Truth and Reconciliation Day. Students and staff are invited to wear orange shirts to show solidarity with Canada's Indigenous Peoples

Adjournment Meeting adjourned at 8:30

Next Meeting Wednesday October 26th 7-:8:30