



ST. MARY C.S.S. PARENT COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY, February 3, 2021

(Virtual)

Executive Members	Name	Attendance
Principal	Susan Duane	P
Chair	Beatrice Povolo	P
Vice Chair	Samuel Koroma	P
Secretary	Shelley McMurter	P
Financial Secretary	Emily Povolo	P
Teacher Representative	Melissa Wilson-Clark	P
Parish/Non-Teaching Representative	Tomy Valookaran	P
Parent Representatives		
Parent Representative	Adele Sartor	P
Parent Representative	Andrea Szollos	Ab
Parent Representative	Cordelia Clark Julien	P
Parent Representative	Jill Williams	Ab
Parent Representative	Keisha Petrolo	P
Parent Representative	Louella DiFrancesco	P
Parent Representative	Nancy Barry	Ab
Parent Representative	Rizza Andrade	P
Parent Representative	Samantha McLachlan	P
Parent Representative	Zhora Adatia-McGlashen	P

Attendance: P= Present Ab = Absent R = Regrets

Other Attendees:

Elizabeth Alfarano Vicky Aruwa

Josie Cimone

Natalie Cole-Luces Margret Brimpong – Director, Equity and Engagement Officer, School Board

Patricia Bailey Susie Lee-Fernandes – Superintendent of Education, School Board

CALL TO ORDER

Meeting Called to Order: 7:02 pm

Opening Prayer: T. Valookaran

SCHOOL BOARD DISCUSSION

Welcome and Introductions: B. Povolo / S. Duane

- B. Povolo welcomed everyone and opened the meeting
- S. Duane introduced Susie Lee-Fernandes and Margaret Brimpong

- Before turning over the meeting to the 2 board members, Ms. Duane highlighted the many events St. Mary's has participated in over the years from 2016 – 2021 – visit the St. Mary's webpage
 - o There will be a series of "Let's Talk" virtual evenings to take place in February from 6:30-8pm:
 - Wednesday February 3rd, Diversity in Blackness
 - Wednesday February 10th, Colourism
 - Wednesday February 17th, Origins and Effects of Self-Hate
 - o Links are available on the St. Mary's webpage
 - o This year's theme is building a future and the 2021 posters will feature the African Bird as the symbol

Presentation: S. Lee-Fernandes / M. Brimpong

- S. Lee-Fernandes is a Superintendent of Education with the Durham Catholic School Board – she was a teacher and principal in the school board for many years and has been in her board position since 2020
- M. Brimpong graduated from Denis O'Connor in the 90s and is currently with the Durham Catholic School Board as the Director, Equity and Engagement Officer, S. Lee-Fernandes opened the presentation indicating that this presentation was presented at the January 25th board meeting
 - o It is a follow-up to the Anti-Black Racism Consultations which took place November 2, 2020 to December 14, 2020 where 38 students and 48 parents/guardians provided input
 - o Input was also received from:
 - Unity Group at St. Mary
 - Student Senate – Inclusivity Recommendations from Student Consultation (June 12, 2020)
 - Board Consultation with Black and Racialized Students (November 2, 2020 to December 14, 2020)
 - Break the Chains, Pickering – Board Delegation with recommendations (December 14, 2020)
 - o The input collected identified 6 action items the board is implementing:
 - Development of an Anti-Racism Policy – first reading at the next Policy Board Meeting (March 8, 2021)
 - Establishing an advisory committee to focus on Anti-Black racism to support and help coordinate school and system level engagement
 - Ongoing training including:
 - Anti-Black racism pilot workshop took place in October 2020 which included 40 teachers across 4 secondary schools
 - Challenging Systemic Barriers: Anti-Racism and Equity training for leaders took place November/December 2020 with 80 schools and system leaders
 - Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy Practitioner Inquiry with the Equity Secretariat currently taking place with 3 schools and board team
 - Racial Equity Facilitator Training taking place in February 2021 through the Equity Literacy Institute
 - Mandatory Anti-Black racism training for secondary educators on February 12, 2021
 - Actions related to human resources, including all administrators having an equity goal within their annual learning plans, a new hiring policy and administrative procedure that reflects the Ministry of Education expectations on teacher hiring, and Anti-Black racism strategies and tools embedded within the onboarding training to new staff
 - Data collection and analysis to further understand, address, and monitor the adverse impacts of systemic racism

- Hosting an equity symposium in May with elements of student belonging and different voices
- There will be ongoing communication and regular updates that will be provided on the Board's Equity and Inclusive Education [webpage](#):
 - Conversation with Senior Administration on the Implementation of Anti-Black Racism Strategy and Out Collective Equity Work – February 16, 2021 at 7pm - 8pm
 - Report back to stakeholders on the progress and next steps of the Anti-Black Racism Strategy – May/June 2021

Discussion:

- A parent council member shared that what the Board is doing is great, but the parent council would like to get a better sense of what is happening in terms of the yearbook investigation
 - The Board indicated that unfortunately, there is not a lot that can be shared on the investigation as there are many branches to the investigation - there is a legal piece that can never be shared but there will be a statement from the Director out shortly

- A parent council member provided that we understand that there are aspects of the investigation that cannot be discussed but would like to understand if there is anything that can be shared in terms of the lessons learned or processes that have been put in place to ensure this does not happen again
 - The Board has taken accountability for the racist comments in the yearbook and acknowledges that it has happened previously at St. Mary and other schools
 - The Board is interrogating the process and looking to put safe guards in place so it does not happen again
 - The Board recognizes that this is a symptom of a deeper issue which needs to be addressed and has been a big push to ensure it does not happen again

- A parent council member provided feedback around the yearbook investigation process not being transparent and explained that it would be useful if the steps around a general investigation were outlined – also indicated that consultations are new and often students attend presentations where students can listen but they are not being engaged in conversations
 - The Board was thankful for the comments and recognized the validity around the consultations
 - The Board also requested that parents read the Anti-Racism Policy – the policy will go through 3 readings before it is past – the Board wants to receive feedback

- A parent council member reiterated the importance of transparency and accountability as we try to build the trust with students, parents, and community – as the investigation is inconclusive, we want to show students that there is accountability and consequences which will help to build student trust
 - The Board confirmed that the community has suffered from perceived and real lack of accountability and that this has to change
 - The Board is looking for dialogue and communication from the community as parents are choosing to bring their children to the Catholic School Board
 - The Board is committed but it will take time as there are incidents of anti-black racism between teachers to teachers, teachers to students, and students to students
 - There will be aspects that the Board cannot talk about but it recognizes the need to increase the communication
 - It is important that the students, parents, and community keep asking the tough questions so things will continue to move forward by putting the pressure on opening up the dialogue and turning over the culture – the students need to feel like part of the faith so we need to continue to build upon the good work and increase the pressure to make real change

- A parent council member acknowledged that we are all human and things happen, but as a Catholic community we need to stand out from the crowd otherwise there is no difference in sending our children to a Catholic school – we need to ensure this type of event cannot happen again
 - The Board acknowledged this to be true and indicated that this would not be solved quickly as there are many layers and problems at all levels
 - The systemic pieces of the issue will be challenging to change but the Board is looking into the challenges and creating policies and procedures that will be implemented
 - As the investigations into the issues is huge and the Board is trying to address the resistance in staff, students, and parents
 - The Board continues to be challenged on their strategies and finds that every conversation is important to continue this journey and implement change

- A meeting participant inquired if there are any known reasons for the low participation from parents and students in the consultation that took place from November 2, 2020 to December 15, 2020
 - The Board has reflected on this issue and is disappointed that more students did not participate
 - A few thoughts around the consultation for high school include:
 - A possible trust/safety issue for the students
 - The vehicle used to attempt to reach the students may not have been the best
 - The parent nights were far more successful and the Board is hopeful that these numbers will grow
 - Many of the programs attempting to reach out to the community have seen low numbers
 - The Board is looking to connecting to key people and creating a safe place as the conversations are important
 - The Board also recognizes that the community is getting fatigued from all of the surveys
 - St. Mary recognizes that trust needs to be built and we need to move forward to make sure actions result in impactful change – this will get more student engagement
 - St. Mary has been working with our black students for a long time and educating people to create a caring community – the school wants the students to feel that their voices are being heard

- A meeting participant pointed out that the strategy presented does not appear to help students feel comfortable in reporting racism between students as there is a fear of reprisal from other students –it appears that this issue has been ongoing for years but until the yearbook incident occurred, we were not hearing much – training on anti-racism needs to include the students and not just the teachers
 - St. Mary does have an anonymous reporting process which goes directly to Ms. Duane
 - There is more work to be done and it is disappointing that students are not reporting these issues
 - We need to build relationships of trust so students feel comfortable reporting racism in the school
 - There are lunch'n learns, speakers, and services to recognize biases and road blocks that black students face
 - We have learned a lot this year and the young voices in our community will not tolerate racism and the students will not allow this to continue
 - The Board acknowledged that it plays a significance role in assisting our black students but racism also needs to be addressed at home
 - Racism is imbedded in our social media, sports, encounters with strangers, and many more
 - There is a lot of work occurring at the Board but when students go off school property and racism is supported in the community, then it will keep coming back into the school

- A member of parent council requested that the Board ensure the words they use are carefully vetted – people want to be engaged not consulted, and they want to be engaged at times that are convenient for them – a suggestion to ask parents how they want to be engaged was proposed – the parent council

member also shared that these consultations that go out have people reliving the pain of racism every time the questions are answered – the community needs to see how things are changing and they want transparency

- The parent council member also explained that there is cynicism in the community and people do not use the confidential complaint system because an investigation into the reported incident will get down to the student level and then it becomes known to students who made the report which leads to the student being bullied or ostracized at school – there is a power dynamic when you are dealing with students.
- The parent council member thanked S. Lee-Fernandes and M. Brimpong for making the time to share what the Board is doing and closed that is difficult to have trust in a system where a student reports a racist incident anonymously, then somehow through an investigation they are “outed” and then lives with being bullied or ostracized at school, but when a student commits a racist act like the vandalizing of a school yearbook the investigation comes up “inconclusive”. We, as a school community, have to do and show that we are doing and being better. There is currently a lack of trust which should not be the burden on the Black community to solve - the Board needs to build that trust.
- For anyone interested in participating in the Advisory Committee being assembled by the Board, please reach out to Margaret Brimpong at margaret.brimpong@dcdsb.ca

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting Adjourned: 8:55 pm

Closing Prayer: All

Next St. Mary CSS Council Meeting

Wednesday, March 3, 2021 @ 7:00 pm – Virtual Zoom Meeting