

January 22, 2024 – School Council Meeting Minutes

Duke of Connaught Junior and Senior Public School

Location: School Library - in person

Last Meeting: December 11, 2023

Council Members Present: Jill Hollingsworth, Jeffrey Hackett, Marilyn Lacroix, Robyn Switzer, Chris Hazard

Council Members Absent: Jason Davie, Natalie Chinsam, Maria Oliveira (Staff)

Teacher Rep: Erin O'Donnell

Parent Attendees: Emily Nicols Angl, Norine Williamson, Jennifer Huang,

Community Partners: Mark Mead, S.H. Armstrong

Admin: Bill Vatzolas (P), Delphine Rule (VP)

Meeting started late, waiting for SC members/parents to arrive.

6:37–6:46 pm

Welcome, LA and Announcements

(Chair: Jill Hollingsworth)

Jill welcomed everyone, and then read the Land Acknowledgement. She made a call for any other business (None) and reminder to share time/respect all attendees.

Please note:

Anytime you want something on the Agenda try to let SC know in advance so time can be set aside. Call for agenda items goes out in Principal Update and NTR weeks ahead of each meeting.

Quick updates:

Dance-a-thon:

The Dance-a-thon is coming up on January 31. All pledges due in by Monday, January 29. Information about the event has been shared digitally - students can request songs in advance. Reminder forms should have gone home today (January 22.)

Want to join Council or learn more?

The Parent Involvement Advisory Committee (PIAC) is offering a conference on Saturday February 3. This year's theme is about empowering School Councils. An email went out from the school, and you can register in advance.

New School Council member:

Jennifer Huang has announced her intention to join the School Council. Following our usual process for adding council members outside of our fall election, we will now post this information publicly and then Jennifer will be appointed at the next SC meeting on February 26.

Please note: Parents can always reach SC at dukeschoolcouncil@gmail.com (and/or check info on website: dukesac.ca)

6:46 pm

Past minutes approval - SC members voted to accept the minutes from our previous SC meeting on December 11. Jeffrey Hackett moved to accept the minutes, Chris Hazard seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved.

6:47–6:54 pm

Community Partners Update

Applegrove: May Seto from Applegrove sent regrets and provided an update about a new community cooking series. Applegrove, in partnership with The East End Food Hub and the Leslieville Farmers' Market, is offering cooking classes at the Hub. The classes run at The Hub You can find more information and a link to register at applegrove.ca

S.H. Armstrong:

Mark Mead from S.H. Armstrong joined us to provide an update on the Centre:

- Summer registration opens on February 7 (which is earlier than usual, so spread the word)
- The Centre has been busy - family gym on Friday had 90 people!
- Ball hockey is popular - the Thursday ball hockey has 20 people (last year, program cancelled)
- There is now an Instagram account run by Emily Nicolas Angl (Duke parent), which makes it possible for the centre to quickly share updates on hours and activities.
- You can follow them on Instagram @SHArmstrongCC

A Woodgreen representative was not in attendance.

6:54–6:58 pm

Dismantling Inequities Committee Update

Meeting: We have scheduled an open, drop in, public meeting at S.H. Armstrong on February 1. We will share details via email and in an upcoming NTR.

Workshops:

We are actively working to find a date for our Canvas “Gender Diversity” workshop. We have worked with Canvas before (last time we did a session about creating safe spaces for 2SLGBTQ+ people.) There is no fee to attend since we want to remove barriers and we received grant money to support educational activities for our parent/caregiver community on the topic of equity and inclusion.

The group discussed:

Timing:

We are looking at late February or early March (potentially February 22)

Time of day:

7-8:30 pm is the most likely timing

Delivery:

We asked for feedback about doing the session online or in-person (hybrid is not available and it will not be recorded) ... the overall feeling is that in-person would be more effective.

6:58–7:10 pm

Treasurer's Report

Money out

- Pizza costs to date
- Bank fees
- TSO

Money in:

- \$24K in pizza money (does not include expenses yet). Pizza lunches will be pre-purchased by buying Gift Cards through Flip Give. This will provide School Council with over \$1,000 in cash back gift cards to be used.
- Dance-a-thon: pledges just starting to come in: \$330 by e-transfer and will be confirmed. Credit card, SCO payments, cash and cheques due back on January 29

Currently have \$32,000 in the account

Duke Cares:

There is \$421 left, as we have provided quite a bit of support over the past two months. Council discussed reallocating funds to increase the balance in the Duke Cares - line in budget

Vote: there was a motion to move \$579 to the account, and the council passed it unanimously.

Questions:

•Do all classes go to the TSO? Most will ... 5 trips have been booked (the primary classes go February 5/6) and there is one more trip to be booked. TSO will also come to the school for the Kindergarten classes (and potentially one group of classes, Ms Pierce/Mr.Pedlar working on it, as they couldn't get enough tickets for TSO for everyone) - everyone gets a musical experience.

7:10–7:30 pm

Community discussion

Community concerns:

The pool - what's happening with schedule, staffing notifications?

P - There is a new schedule that takes us to Family Day. Teachers have signed their classes up for swim periods. The challenge with swim classes is that there must be two qualified trained aquatics teachers on deck for classes to run, and there are a lot of qualified TDSB aquatics teachers who are currently supporting phys ed programs because several pools are closed for maintenance.

Note: The current support person is temporary until then and staff are working with TDSB to get someone permanently assigned.

Questions:

Could staff remind teachers to let kids (and parents) when swimming classes are scheduled? Yes.

Is this why the swim team practice timing has changed? Yes.

Pool Change Rooms: What is the status of the request to build stalls? What is happening to make change rooms available for non-binary or otherwise uncomfortable kids? There is a request in with the TDSB, and the Principal checked on it before the break, but there is no update yet. It is likely that the Board is trying to figure out how to deliver a solution in multiple schools, since it is unlikely Duke is the only school dealing with this.

Advocacy around staffing levels at school: Recently, Council had a meeting to look at upcoming activities and revisit input from the last Council meeting. Advocacy around staffing was one of the topics we discussed.

This year, we lost “half” a VP and “half” a secretary—which in reality, meant we lost two important people in the office. We lost 3 lunchroom supervisors, and based on anecdotal feedback from parents, that has had an impact on how kids are eating. SC members want to draft a letter about staffing at the school to send to the Superintendent—we want to make it abundantly clear that our current office staff are doing an amazing job, but that they cannot do it all and need more support - particularly concerned about mental health and staff burnout (TDSB says mental health top priority). We know the Board is heading into their budget phase and we want to get out in front of the Superintendent before that process closes.

Jill pointed out that, at this point, more cuts will be very negative for the school community. We need to ask for more although the TDSB had a shortfall last year and the money that Trustees found for some schools in this school year is not likely to be available for the next school year.

A parent raised a question about making the request bigger: She thought we could press MPPs, it might have more impact on GSN/education grants. Comment, don't want to get more staff at Duke at the expense of other schools. At the last meeting in December this was discussed, as follow up to discussion at the November meeting, however, we decided for this year the School Council is focusing internally on Duke and advocacy at the local level.

Parents/ caregivers who are interested to advocate for increased funding for education, can join external existing political activist groups (i.e. East End Parents for Education - our Trustee Sara Ehrhardt part of that, organizes) and/or reach out to the PIAC rep for our Ward Jennifer Volk, PIAC.Ward15@tdsb.on.ca. We are going to focus our efforts on the people who make the decisions about the actual budget dollars (Board, Trustee, Supers) that are available, staffing allocations and lobby for our school and our kids.

There have been several changes to the revenue streams supporting schools - there is not a direct school tax on the community, developers no longer pay fees and taxes to cover schools. (Someone asked if Catholic Board still gets money from developers. Jennifer will follow up.)

What about the disparity between communities that means school councils work with a wide range of budgets, different schools are able to fundraise way more than others? The TDSB sometimes raises the issue and has suggested all money be pooled and redistributed. Families have balked at that in the past, suggesting they might not raise money if that happens. (Follow up question: aren't we limited in what we can buy / pay for? Yes, we are, but

we can buy computers, we can pay for activities and field trips that enrich the learning process, etc. So having a bigger budget directly impacts kids but is limited. We can't pay for the improvements needed at the school or missing items for education. Need to balance out fundraising, what we ask from the community, what is sustainable and required on a regular basis. Have special fundraising when there are bigger items, e.g. additions to outdoor areas)

Please note:

You can attend TDSB Trustee meetings - they are all public, you can go in person or join via digital link ... you can find information about upcoming meetings on the TDSB website.

Hot lunch ticket system

Jill raised that there has been confusion, a lack of communication prior to implementation (as well as missed lunches and anxious kids) - how can we help kids with this? When there are changes can we please have communication prior to the change to support parents in assisting prep with their kids?

Principal Vatzolas explained that there have been some challenges with some students not ordering/paying. Of course, there are systems in place to support families who need it, but Maureen also needed to track lunches to know how much to make (make sure those who ordered actually get their lunch) and figure out who had not paid.

The tickets are supposed to be handed out by teachers, taken to the lunchroom, and handed in so the child can collect the lunch they have ordered.

7:30–8:00 pm

Principal's Report

Ski trips:

It has been an active return after winter break with two ski trips for Junior and Intermediate students. Feedback from the more than 340 kids and staff who went on the two trips was that they loved it! And the school was able to sponsor some of the students who had a challenge finding the funds for the trip.

Island Nature School:

The second Island Natural School Trip is coming up in late February.

Toronto Symphony Orchestra:

The first dates for field trips to the TSO are booked on February 6 and 7 for Grades 1 to 3.

Report cards:

Report cards go home on February 13

Conferences:

Student/parent/teacher conferences will be booked for February 15 and the morning of the 16th (a PD Day)

PA Day:

February 16 is our next PD Day.

School Musical:

The development of the school musical is well underway. The script is written by the staff/students, the rehearsals have started, and kids and staff are working hard to bring it all together: set design, technical work, on stage performances, music, etc. The musical runs April 30 to May 2.

Sports:

Sports teams / activities are going well. The swim team is practicing at lunch time. Ice hockey and ball hockey are running, as well as basketball and volleyball. The school is earning lots of banners this year!

Band program:

The itinerant band teacher is now working, and the band program is running for Grades 6-8. Originally, the school planned for Band to include Grade 5 students as well, but the response was overwhelming, and the school just does not have enough instruments. The admin is hoping to have a strings teacher for the spring, but they must find someone who can work at Duke as well as continuing with the schedules at other schools.

Construction:

There are several areas fenced off around the school. This is part of the TDSB's preventative maintenance program. They are removing bricks to "look around" to make sure all is well in the walls (looking for issues, or to confirm there are none.) The last time they did this at Duke was about 10 years ago.

The window installations are almost done.

The steam-to-water boiler conversion is in the preliminary stages (they are doing some prep work in the basement right now, making pipes.) The Board is updating the heating and ventilation systems equipment is past its' lifespan, new system will be more efficient. A letter will go home with students soon. It is a huge job, but they will do most of the work through the summer, which means the daycare and Applegrove will need to relocate temporarily. However, the school must be ready for students returning and the heat must be on by October. There will be disruptions between now and June, but they will do their best to keep the noise and mess to a minimum.

Questions:

This is an old building - what about air quality? asbestos?

Yes - construction is dusty and dirty, and any building built before 1985 can be assumed to have asbestos. There is an asbestos management process—the Principal has binder related to the program as well as a list of every material in every room, which helps to inform how they handle work in each room. The TDSB hires a third party (Safetech Environmental) to manage the process. The air quality is tested and assessed at 3 levels. At level 3, they must take steps to clean the air.

Will the boiler conversion improve the temperature in summer months?

This is a 1-for-1 replacement, so no air conditioning is being added, but it should make it less

hot in the winter months. Currently, the system also heats the pool, which makes the whole building hot as the system tries to warm the water for the pool. The new system should separate the heating functions for the school and the pool.

What if they delay through the summer? Other construction projects have been sitting "in progress" for a long time, so what happens if they do not finish?

Because it is a project affecting the heating, they have no choice but to get it done by October.

What happens if they take shelves or other features out to get the radiators out? Is that another project to have things rebuilt?

No - if the contractors remove shelves or other features, they will put them back. If they are damaged, the contractors will rebuild them.

Will the new heating system offer better control of temperature locally?

No, the BAS system is controlled centrally by the TDSB.

What about the tree deck? What is going on there? The TDSB is working on a solution. The Compacted rocks have been used at corporate offices, hospitals, and other buildings downtown, but it challenges in school applications.

What about the basketball courts? And what is the plan?

Staff are still waiting for a date for this. The plan is that the courts will stay where they are, and we will add other ball court. The good news is the TDSB has nets, and if they are in stock, it means we are closer to getting the work done. They will also replace the wooden fences with 4-foot-tall fencing (chain Link) and the benches will be replaced.

8:01 pm

Wrap up - Jill asked the group if there were any additional questions (none), then thanked the group for joining.

The next meeting is Monday, February 26.

Reminder: follow S.H. Armstrong @SHArmstrongCC

Meeting was adjourned at 8:01 pm