

**W.E. Gowling Parent Council
Parent Information Session Minutes
September 30, 2020**

Virtual meeting (Zoom)
5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Attendees: Cameron Ketchum, Cathy Younger-Lewis, Colleen Weatherdon, Laura McGavin, Kathy Sager, Jessica Roberts, Jason Dubois, Monate Praasma, Shawn Hocking, Caretta Williams DeAveiro, Chelsea Sutcliffe, Tom McKenna, Melissa, Emily Kehoe, Stephanie Pieri, Chrissy Rakobowchuk, Kim Douglas, Tara Beechey, Chelsea Ottaway, Jessica Gibbs

1. Parent Council during 2020-2021 school year

- Parents with kids in the virtual school won't have Parent Council voting powers this year
- All Parent Council elections in the OCDSB must be held virtually by Oct. 14, and individual councils need to arrange for this through Google Meet
- Our first formal Parent Council meeting will be Tuesday, Oct. 13—we'll hold elections and discuss planning, roles and fundraising
- Meetings will be virtual for the near future, which might give some flexibility in timing
- Council is looking for volunteers to run meetings, serve on Executive team, and work on communications, fundraising, schoolyard greening—will send a more precise list of roles to the school community soon

2. Fundraising update

- Two online fundraising programs running this year:
 - FlipGive—shopping platform with an app, gives a 1-8% kickback to Parent Council when people shop online (participating businesses include Home Depot, Esso, Simon's, Indigo, SportChek, Children's Place)
 - Entripy.com—a company selling promotional items like branded t-shirts, sweatshirts, hats, which also gives a percentage kickback of sales

3. Staff update

- 362 students are enrolled in person, 105 in the virtual school
- 10 children want to come back in person, and 10 families want to switch to virtual
- There won't be any movement into the virtual school until the new year, due to staffing
- The COVID-19 reorganization took some classes way, and kinder class sizes are currently 29, 29 and 30—parent letters went to trustee and superintendent to advocate for smaller class sizes
- 10 staff moved to the virtual school (seven teachers, three ECEs)
- We also welcomed one new EA and three new teachers
- This year Gowling has gone "litterless lunch" (students take everything home)
- New procedures for fire drills will be very different: will do small-group drills over the day
- No lockdown practices or drills this year
- The support model is currently using a blended, integrated approach, where the support team goes into classrooms to work with students
- Gowling has adopted the following new safety protocols for COVID-19:

- School board recently provided an updated screening tool
- Kindergarten teachers must wear a face shield and mask
- Non-scheduled teachers must sign in and out of classrooms
- If there's a positive case in school, admin needs to wait for confirmation from Ottawa Public Health (OPH) before putting procedures in place
- A positive case could result in a class closure
- Two or more cases is an outbreak and could result in a school closure
- The library is currently closed
- The school's isolation space is in the large gym, and there are protocols to follow if a student isn't feeling well while at school
- There are no visitors allowed, not even social workers or psychologists
- Overall, staff and students are doing well with the new procedures and routines
- The biggest concern at the moment is what children can do at recess without balls to play with—they do have skipping ropes and school is waiting to hear if balls can return to the yard

4. Parent Q&A—Answers from staff

- Gowling is asking to add a kinder class, to create classes in the high-teens or low-twenties
- Students don't have access to the big gym for now; phys ed is all outside, though admin may be scheduling classes in the small gym when the weather gets colder
- Gowling is having trouble with teacher shortages, especially for French—admin can't always find and retain French teachers for non-core subjects
- Children are not allowed to change in and out of clothing or footwear for the time being (for example, from soggy boots to inside shoes)
- At lunchtime, one adult rotates between a number of classrooms for supervision; students are expected to stay at their own desk (no grade six lunch monitors this year)
 - School admin hiring paid lunch monitors, parents are welcome to apply
- Students can't go outside at recess if it's pouring rain
- If a child arrives late to school, the parent/guardian should go the main door with their child, ring the bell, and someone from the office will come and collect them (parent/guardian doesn't come in)
- If a parent calls the school to say their child has tested positive for COVID-19, but OPH hasn't informed the school yet, admin *might* contact parents/guardians of students in that class to say there's been a positive test before OPH reaches out to families
 - The school's actions would depend on the time of day and who the child is
 - Schools need to balance privacy with being transparent and keeping everyone safe
- If one sibling shows symptoms at school, other siblings are also sent home
- Parents aren't allowed to volunteer at school at the moment (for example, to guide kids through recess activities that are socially distant)
- Gowling can still accept donations of clothing and boots, and would quarantine any items for three days before they're used in school
- There hasn't been any relaxation of regulations about outdoor schoolyard equipment
- A Gowling staff member identified a possible partnership with Stephen Leacock in Kanata to purchase stencils for the schoolyard—she plans to submit a proposal to Council for funding
 - Parent Council Schoolyard Greening Committee had previously looked into stencilling, and may have flexibility with the funds set aside for new kinder equipment

- Gowling staff to follow up with Greening Committee member about stencils
- The yard is being well-used for outdoor learning, at teachers' discretion
- Possibility of Jump-a-Thon fundraiser, held outside, or outdoor running race?
- The only materials teachers are asking for at the moment are French books for students to take home and read—proposal to Parent Council to provide funding will come next month; otherwise school has plenty of equipment
- The school's public health nurse is on call and completed a walk-around check, but what their involvement in handling an outbreak would be isn't totally clear
- If a class closes because of a positive case, contacts are notified, everyone goes home for two weeks, and teachers use their Google Classroom or BrightSpace to keep students engaged
- If the entire school closes, Gowling will activate online learning—which is different from the virtual school—until school reopens again
- If we go back to broad school board-wide closures, in-person students would return to remote learning, with mandatory attendance and synchronous/asynchronous learning
 - Students would stay with the same teachers
 - The virtual school would still remain separate, and would continue
- If individual students need to stay home because their sibling is sick or they're waiting for a test result, they can use the Google Classroom space to stay engaged
 - To learn how to login, contact your individual teacher
- If parents/guardians choose to inform other families that their child tests positive before OPH or the school does, that's acceptable from the school's perspective
- Gowling isn't seeing a trend towards virtual school for marginalized or BIPOC families
- Those from racialized communities are in need of Chrome Books
- If kids from these communities have symptoms, they may not be able to access testing, meaning they would have to quarantine for the 14 days
- If Gowling goes fully online at any point, it will be difficult for families to get more than one Chrome Book, and many don't have technology for multiple siblings
- Gowling distributed 180 Chrome Books earlier in the pandemic; there's a huge need still
- Parent Council could consider a donation for Gowling to purchase more Chrome Books
- The vast majority of children are coming to school with masks, including kinders, so not much need for donations, though the school could use smaller sizes
- Most children are being very respectful of social distancing and the changes in school routines and expectations, mask-wearing included

First formal Parent Council meeting of the year: Tuesday, Oct. 13, virtually (Google Meet)