

Update - October 09, 2015

On October 3rd, I attended a great event hosted by the OCDSB Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) and the Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils (OCASC). The School Council Training Day saw over 100 attendees, many of whom play the critical role of school council chair in our elementary and secondary schools across the District. Thanks to all of you for the time you give to make our schools better places for students.

In addition to the workshops that were offered, participants were given the opportunity to hear a wonderful keynote speaker, Annie Kidder. Annie is the heart and soul of a non-profit organization--[People for Education](#). Although not an educator herself, Annie became involved in education when her children were in school, was elected as school council chair, and then began this organization to protect and support public education within Ontario and beyond.

Annie spoke to the group about two pieces of her work that are closely linked to initiatives in our school district. The first piece is framed as *Measuring What Matters*. Her organization has gathered research from around the world that identifies key predictors of success for students, critical learning components that should be embedded into every day instruction. The five identified components are creativity, citizenship, health, social-emotional learning and quality learning environment. These elements are commonly referred to as soft skills, social emotional skills, or non-cognitive skills. Annie is quick to note that it doesn't mean we should be walking away from the cognitive skills of literacy and numeracy, nor does this take away from the importance of EQAO testing of reading, writing, and mathematics skills. But it does beg the question of how to teach and assess these skills in K-12 classrooms.

The OCDSB has been involved in the very same type of thinking. Some of you may remember that two years ago we began a community conversation regarding the characteristics and skills that every student should have when leaving our school system at the end of grade 12. We heard from students, staff, parents, school councils and community members. Out of this process came our [OCDSB Exit Outcomes](#). Irrespective of whether students are heading directly to the world of work or on to post-secondary education, our students will be resilient, globally aware, creative and innovative, collaborative, and goal-oriented. They will be critical thinkers, communicators, digitally fluent, academically diverse, and ethical decision makers.

The next piece of our District work is determining how these elements will be assessed. Luckily, these elements are already embedded in the Ontario Curriculum in grades K to 12. Some are highlighted across the subject areas; others are entwined in the learning skills that parents see on the provincial report card. At the OCDSB, we are in the process of developing self-assessment tools that, for the five characteristics in the Exit Outcomes, will be used by students in grades 7, 10, and 12. They will help all students learn about what it means to be resilient, for example, as well as how they can work on developing this characteristic in school and beyond. The self-assessment tool is being developed by a group of teachers, principals, and students, working with the guidance of Dr. Oliver John, a leading academic from Berkley University in California.

Annie's second area of focus in her keynote address was what parents can do to support their children's learning. Again, after an extensive review of the research, *People for Education* have identified four key areas for involvement: setting high expectations, talking about school, building positive attitudes and strong work habits, and reading with children. Annie was quick to point out that these actions are not simply done. As a parent of two teenagers, I was very relieved to hear her say that!

Parental engagement is also one of five key components in our Board's new [strategic plan](#). We know that some parents like to become involved at the school level, e.g., participating in school council, fundraising activities, special events, and/or volunteering in classrooms. We really appreciate this support! Others prefer to connect to education through their own child. So it's now time to open up the conversation as to how parents would like to connect to their children's learning. We want to know how we can support parents. We understand that it may look different depending on the age of the child, the family's cultural

background, and the prior experiences of parents in education systems. We're looking to create a new, broader definition of parental involvement based on your input.

An interesting connection between the two topics of measuring what counts and parental engagement was made when Annie cited a principal in another school district who spoke of the challenge of delineating the role of school and home in supporting teaching and learning. For example, many parents don't feel they have the background to support their children in mathematics and other subject areas in the higher grades. But when we think of social emotional skills like resiliency and collaboration, like creativity and working hard to achieve goals, every parent, grandparent, and extended family member can play a supporting role.

Our District is looking forward to these discussions. We hope you'll join us!

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