

School District 72 Board News

MEETING OF
FEB. 1, 2022

February 2, 2022
INFORMATION RELEASE

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Chairperson Remarks

Ahead of a later presentation on the agenda, Chairperson Kerr opened the meeting by praising Phoenix counsellor Ryan Chenard, teacher Shannon Lim and Phoenix Middle School students for their work in creating a wellness journal that was shared with the board in their agenda package.

He continued his remarks by acknowledging that recently the Sooke School District announced that as of March 7 they would require all Sooke school district employees to show proof of vaccination or undergo weekly rapid tests. Sooke School District joins Delta, Peace River South, Nanaimo-Ladysmith, and Revelstoke as districts that have imposed a vaccine mandate for staff.

The School District 72 Board of Education decided against a vaccine mandate in November with a caveat that should circumstances change the decision could be reviewed. Chairperson Kerr shared that at this time the Campbell River School District is still not considering imposing a vaccine mandate.

Chairperson Kerr continued by recognizing the service of Lyn Logan, executive assistant to the superintendent for the last 14 years, upon her retirement. He shared that during his time as a trustee Lyn had been courteous and made every effort to help when he needed it. He thanked Lyn for her service to the district and wished her a happy retirement.

In closing, he also thanked staff for their efforts to normalize the educational experience of all students in these uncertain times. He expressed his hope that we can soon focus solely on learning and achievement without the cloud of COVID and wished everyone a successful half to the school year.

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Superintendent Remarks

Superintendent Morrow shared that since the return of winter break the district has seen an increase in student and staff absences compared to the usual number of absences for this time of year. He said though that it is important to note that not all absences may be a result of COVID.

He stated that throughout the pandemic there have been moments where the contributions of each employee group to the function and support of the system have been particularly seen. Lately, the vital role that teachers teaching on call and casual support staff play in our system has been even more apparent.

He expressed his gratitude to this dedicated group of professional employees who wake up to a different assignment in a different school each day to support the needs of students. He also thanked the itinerant, non-enrolling and other staff that have stepped up to provide coverage during this challenging period.

Superintendent Morrow shared that in a recent call with the North Island medical health officer he found it reassuring to hear that health professionals are seeing indicators that we could be on the other side of the Omicron peak and that we may be nearing a time where illness is not so disruptive to schools and student learning.

Shifting his attention away from COVID, Superintendent Morrow stated that K-8 parents can expect a second report card providing an update on their child's progress from elementary and middle schools in February.

Lastly, he also shared that schools are preparing for the Battle of the Books, an annual competition that encourages



kids to read and gives them an opportunity to share their understanding in a trivia style competition.

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Anti-Racism Learning Group Supporting Teachers in How to Introduce Issues of Racism and Bias

An anti-racism learning group that started as a small group of educators has grown to a group of close to 40 interested in how to introduce issues of racism and bias to students that allows for non-violent critical thinking, discussion and dialogue.

As the pandemic brought racial disparities and inequity more to light and recent events such as George Floyd, Black Lives Matter, Ahmed Arbery, the rise of white nationalism, an anti-science movement and the defining discovery of the remains of 215 Indigenous children from the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation, teachers have been trying to deal with these issues in their classroom with sensitivity.

Rachel Friedrich, Gillian Kirke and Kash Ward began to explore how to carve out more space for teachers to do this work and started a group that meets once a month for 75 minutes after school. The group has now grown to include close to 40 educators from both middle and secondary schools.

The goal is to invite learning through authentic dialogue, make room for multiple perspectives and voices, invite curiosity about our local context with regards to racism and anti-racism.

The group has been using the book, *Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools and Beyond* by Glenn E. Singleton, as the framework for deepening their learning and dialogue and addressing racial disparities.

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Phoenix Students Create a Wellness Journal by Students for Students

A wellness journal by students for students is helping to give Phoenix Middle School students a safe outlet to start to work through their thoughts and feelings about COVID, depression, anxiety, and anything else that might be concerning them as they navigate their day-to-day life.

School counsellor Ryan Chenard came up with the idea as part of a strong desire to try to break down the stigma kids can have about mental health and receiving counselling. He enlisted the help of art teacher Shannon Lim to help bring it to life after he saw more students struggling through the pandemic and having a hard time sharing.

For several years the school had been spending money on journals, sketchbooks, colouring books and self-guided activity books on anxiety, self-awareness and self-esteem to provide as counselling resources for students.

However, what works for one student might not work for another and so matching the student with the right resource was tricky and often books were being handed back after hardly being used and the school would then try to reuse it for another student.

The intent was to create a sample book of a range of activities that could help students identify what they connect with and that could be broadly distributed to all students, whether they accessed counselling services or not. So that, when students needed help, students had greater self-awareness of what they connect with, and the school could provide them with more targeted resources.

Chenard turned to students within the school to compile their own book of activities. Over 30 students worked on the book in various ways – from trying and identifying activities that they liked for inclusion in the book to the artwork for students to colour and build upon with their own drawings. And, according to Chenard it is truly a representation of all students in the school.

The journal, which has been given out to start to students through the counselling department, is to help students focus on building their own self-awareness and to give them activities that could help them become more conscious of



how they are thinking and feeling. The journal also offers ways that students can get immediate help and support.

It is designed to be taken and completed anywhere and has all the tools students need; a pencil and eraser and mini-pencil crayons included in a pouch on the front cover.

Chenard hopes that next year it can be given out to all grade 6 students in their first week of school and groups like the Foundry have also expressed a desire to have the journals available through their offices.

This project is a great example of how schools are taking steps to address the wellbeing of their students and staff under the mental health framework and towards the district's strategic goal to build a culture of learning and wellness.

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Board Sets New Policy on Pro-D for Exempt Staff

The Board of Education has adopted a new board governance policy on professional development for exempt staff.

Under the new policy the superintendent will examine each role and report to the board upon contract renewal a recommended discretionary professional development allocation on a scale of between 2% and 5% for each exempt staff member.

A notice of motion was given to allow for feedback at the board's January 11 public meeting. [View the new policy.](#)

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Quarterly Finance Report Shows District Over Budget on Sick Coverage

Secretary-Treasurer Kevin Patrick warned the board that the district's quarterly report to the end of December 2021 shows that expenses are \$1.2 million more than expected, largely due to a significant increase in teacher on call (TTOC) costs.

Secretary-Treasurer Patrick said that the positive is that staff have been heeding the district's health and safety protocols to stay home when sick, as evidenced by the increased use of sick time across all employee groups.

The district budget is prepared based on estimates in May and the actual budget is set in September based on final enrolment numbers.

Revenues are up by \$600,000 to date, but supply costs and teacher wages are over budget, in addition to TTOC costs being 40% higher than expected from September to December.

The finance department will be monitoring the situation closely through monthly reports, but Secretary-Treasurer Patrick cautioned the board that at this point they may need to draw \$1 million out of emergency contingency to cover the overage.

He also cautioned that heading into the budget development process there could be a need to increase sick leave budgets across all employee groups, which would mean a need to find reductions elsewhere.

The district currently has \$1.2 million in emergency contingency and \$1.3 million in unrestricted surplus but has prudently tried to only draw up to 1/3 of the surplus in any given year to be able to address unexpected costs.

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