



Cape Breton-Victoria

Regional Centre for Education

Meeting of the Regional School Advisory Council

Brookland Elementary, 6:45 p.m.

In attendance:

John Berk
Allison Boutilier
Beth Gillis
Kirt Winter
Natalie MacAskill
Leslie Shepard

Susan Kelley
Suzanne Aucoin
Marjorie Graham

Unable to attend:

Veronica Merryfield
Krista Smith
Alex Paul

Welcome

Susan opened the meeting by welcoming everyone, including our three new members, and did a land acknowledgement followed by recognition of our African Nova Scotians who have been in Nova Scotia for over 400 years as well as the presence and contributions of our Acadians and Gaels. She then facilitated introductions. The agenda and previous meeting notes were reviewed. Susan provided a brief overview of the Regional SAC group's mandate.

Provincial Conference

This was briefly discussed. The Provincial SAC Conference is later this year, November 28, since it takes time to get all the SACs in place at the beginning of the school year. Last year there were over 800 in attendance, and those from this group who attended found it very worthwhile. A few will be attending again this year.

School Supply Program

Suzanne Aucoin, Coordinator of FSL/Programs/Support Programs, and responsible for SACs, attended this meeting to provide an update on where we are providing essential school supplies to students. Suzanne discussed last year's initiative to provide schools supplies free to all students in P-8. (refer to Feb. 12/25 notes which were handed out for details). While 80% of schools were in favor of this initiative, the primary concern was how it would be funded.

Following the initial steps, and once a decision was made on what would be on this school supply list, Suzanne worked with our Purchasing Department to obtain three quotes. This process required detailed product specifications, so she went back to schools to get the necessary information. At the end of the day, Hamster was the only company who came back

with a viable list and gave us very competitive pricing. All this came together late in the school year, resulting in some schools already placing their orders. For those who used it, they found it to be successful. They would, however, like the system to be more functional, so they could digitally select items/amounts from a list. This will be discussed and promoted at a principals' meeting during the school year. It was also very important that when schools place an order it could be delivered to each individual school. Hamster was able to provide this service. Approximately 50% of schools provided schools supplies P-8 using these quotes.

The Strait has implemented a similar program. Suzanne will connect with them and get some feedback re process/funding and come back to this group to share. There was some discussion about getting other quotes, but since Hamster's pricing is good and they came through when other companies didn't, it may be best to stay with them.

The process for funding the supplies varied across individual schools. If there is a student fee for supplies, family pricing should be available. The idea of fundraising was raised. There could be resistance raising funds for a school versus students, so Susan suggested that it could be fundraising for "student supplies" and there should be communication with the province, so it is understood that this is for students to make things more equitable. Schools need to decide their unique approach.

Other Updates

Susan talked about Undercurrent and their backpack program. Trevor Denhartogh reached out to her to let us know that it is possible that they will be able to serve the entirety of CBRM in 2026. She told him that it would be important to include Victoria County schools as well. The question was raised as to whether hygiene products would be included. She will find out all the parameters around this.

A report on the utilization of SAC money is requested by EECD each year. It is important that all money is spent; otherwise, they could assume it isn't needed. Suzanne provided the group with a summary report on how the money was spent in elementary, middle, and high schools. She was credited for her efforts in working with schools and SACs to get these reports completed and to the Department on time. Suzanne gave an example of SAC spending. One school purchased a \$600 costume with SAC money to create a mascot for their school. The mascot shows up as a special guest at events, presentations and congratulates students for a job well done. It is a great idea that added to the school spirit. Think small – one idea at a time!

Susan then talked about a new survey instrument – Thought Exchange, which is an online platform for public consultations and gathering feedback from students, staff, families, and the community. The platform has AI capability that takes responses and helps to organize and analyze them. She let them know that we now have a license and we would put this on the agenda for our next meeting.

It was asked if the members of this committee could share what was discussed in this meeting with their individual SACs and the answer was yes, they can. There was some

discussion around what schools can have regarding snacks/treats in school. Susan said that there is a provincial policy that all schools should be following which does include a “once a month” opportunity where they could have treats outside of the policy. Debbie Madore is our School Food Lead, and she can come in to talk to this group about our food policy.

Additional Information

Our next meeting will be January/February. We will do a survey to see if people would prefer to meet in person or on Teams.

The meeting ended at 8:10.