

Comox Valley Montessori Society – PAC Minutes November 16, 2016

Attendance: Tammy Sawatsky, Sarah Countess, Amelia Valmorbida, Trish McPhail, Christine VanderRee, Sherry Turnbull, Colin Hanes, Allan Douglas, Tricia Bukta, Rasanne Gerritsen

Call to order: 7:12pm

Adopt Agenda & October Minutes – Sherry, Trish seconded

Admin Report (Christine) – nothing new for Montessori; adding Montessori to existing staff meetings; keeping log of Montessori materials used

Allan Douglas, Director of Instruction (Elementary) – Open Q&A session

Q: In Queneesh, when the neighbourhood program is full, new children are placed into Montessori. I feel we are losing the integrity of the program, especially in higher grades, due to these children & families having no Montessori background. These children do not know how to exist in a Montessori environment, the teacher spends much time helping this child, the environment shifts & education suffers. Why is this happening?

A: Have to look at the school district's big picture. Registration is now a central process completed at the district office. As a public entity, the district (Allan) finds an available spot for a student. Lots of considerations into decisions, for example: some schools are full; some families cannot transport their children to school in other parts of the community; need to provide support to the children as best as possible.

Q: Worried people may stop registering for Montessori as the program dilutes.

A: Every student/family that comes in sits with the principal, is given choices available in the school, then picks best fit.

Q: Ramifications in the classroom: not fair to students or teacher & is a huge stress. How do we help the classroom?

A: I would talk to the principal & vice principal about what happens when it comes up.

Christine: It is discussed at staff meetings; support to the child struggling. We see successes in that we're starting to meet some needs of non-experience kids with parents saying "my child has never done so well".

Q: Can we provide a support package to these families? Help the transition?

A: I understand the frustration. Remember in a public setting, with public dollars, we have to figure out how to make it work. The SD believes in the program & wants it to work. Feedback like "most success a child has had" tells us the program is successful regardless of friction/hiccups in class.

Q: Can there be potential for more EA Montessori training to help?

A: EA time is driven by coded children – some codes get lots of support & some get none. Class size is driven by contracts. Of approximately 164 Montessori kids this year, there of 2 children with no prior experience.

Q: Sounds like we need to fill the Montessori classrooms at registration so last minute neighbourhood kids won't have a space in a Montessori classroom.

Christine: A lot of time is spent setting up composition & splits fairly.

A: Surprised by the scope of discontent & argument due to just 2 children this year. On a district scale, that is small. The program is successful.

Q: Did you anticipate an adjustment period when filling seats?

A: The Boost Teacher/Joyful Learning Teacher gives extra accommodation to those students to ease transition. In past there has been a bit of trouble settling in.

A: Some families report they struggle just to get through the day, so to give them a Montessori guide to follow at home & help their child in the classroom would be an added challenge they likely couldn't add.

Q: Montessori has a focus on accessibility & welcoming environment for anyone that arrives. The philosophy is built around special needs & at-risk kids.

A: The SD has never set out to dilute or sabotage the program. There are growing pains & we want to work through them. Montessori already receives \$20,000 extra from the SD budget, so we cannot ask for more (would not be well received).

Q: On what level can a parent volunteer in the classroom?

A: If the teacher is receptive, the parent works with all the children vs just their own, it is a safe working environment.... It can become a CUPE issue because if there are lots of volunteer hours then the argument arises that there should be another EA in the room..... a criminal record check is required for work completed outside the classroom/without teacher supervision.

Q: What might be shifting with the Supreme Court Ruling?

A: BCPC will sit with the BCTF to discuss what it will look like. I assume there will be more teachers.

Q: Do we have enough classrooms for more teachers?

A: The SD is currently doing an audit of the 15 elementary schools for composition, in preparation to illustrate to the government what it will cost.

Q: When can we anticipate seeing changes?

A: BCTF hopes secondary schools will see changes by the 2nd semester (January 2017).

A: Montessori started with 1 classroom in Glacier View Elementary & is now approximately 164 students. SD71 has always been open to programs of choice.

Q: What would class size look like?

A: I don't know, but likely change how many (funded) coded kids per classroom.

Q: Any administratively that can be done to help speed up coding process?

A: Requires a psych assessment & with funding there is a set number per school – we usually get 2 assessments per school

A: We sit at the early learning table once per month & discuss how to support kids before they get to kindergarten. Some families don't access community resources, so we try to reach them to offer support.

President's report – none

Vice President's report – none

Secretary's report – none

New Business: Sherry & Christine will meet to brainstorm how to lend support in the classroom.

Adjourn: 8:15 pm