

**PRAIRIE ROSE SCHOOL DIVISION NO. 8**  
**SUPPORT STAFF / BOARD ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Friday, May 15, 2009**  
**Dunmore Office**

Present G. Westgard, G. Dennis, R. Munroe, C. Heidinger, D. Penner,  
D. Ringrose, R. Scott, P. Cocks

**1. Call to Order and Introductions**

R. Munroe called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

**2. Minutes of the November 14, 2008 Meeting**

Moved by C. Heidinger that the minutes of the November 14, 2008 committee meeting be accepted as presented. **Carried**

**3. Topics Submitted for Discussion**

R. Munroe identified communication as the most important issue that would be mentioned throughout the other agenda items. As an example, it was expressed that some communications are provided by central office staff to the principals and are not always passed along to support staff. It was requested that certain documents are also provided to secretaries who will ensure they are distributed, as required.

**3.1 System Update / Initiatives**

Superintendent D. Nicholls had extended his regrets for his absence due to an unexpected obligation at one of the schools.

G. Westgard provided an update of recent board activities. Items mentioned included the tendering of bus contracts and the closure of Manyberries School. The Board has had several discussions on common timetables and early dismissal dates and there still is some work to be done. The Three-Year Education Plan is under development. The 2009-10 Technology Plan has been approved and includes the centralized purchasing of copiers. The new AISI three-year cycle is in the planning phase.

D. Penner requested that school librarians be asked for input on new equipment required for library systems upgrades.

R. Munroe advised that there are issues with the new phone systems. Some are not working properly a year after installation. It was suggested that the phones be fully operational in one school before they are installed in another. Phones tied into the public address system at SCHS are not working properly. Outside callers have indicated they are frustrated with the voice-message system. Teachers can put classroom phones on ~~to~~ not disturb+which means even the school office can't call in. It was suggested that feedback be gathered from schools that are using VOIP phones on what's working and what's not working and that the Division set up a protocol / training for proper use.

### 3.2 Professional Development for Support Staff

R. Scott reported that custodians are satisfied with the training sessions provided throughout the year. PD activities occur during school breaks so time is not taken away from regular work activities.

D. Ringrose asked that the PD Council increase efforts to have appropriate activities / sessions for teacher assistants (TAs) at the Division PD Day. It was requested that there be TA representation on the Professional Learning Council as there had been in the past. The afternoon of the Division PD Day would be a good opportunity for TAs to meet for a common PD activity. Videoconferencing was also discussed.

Some school-based PD is not always applicable to TAs and they may not be encouraged to attend. TAs would like the same school-based PD opportunities as teachers. Some support staffs attend outside PD events if funds are available.

R. Munroe commented that the recent workshop at Division office for all school secretaries was a very good opportunity for secretaries to get to know one another and share information.

C. Heidinger mentioned that in previous years, central office Administrative Assistants have attended the "Power Within" sessions in Calgary as a group. That has changed so that now some can attend one year and the rest the next. The staff considered it important to attend as a group and don't understand the need to change. P. Cocks committed to providing the staff with a response.

There was a question on whether the date of the Division PD Day was going to change. The end of August isn't a good date for librarians or school secretaries. October or November would be better. Some schools also have a school-based PD Day at the end of August and support staff may miss that one too because of other work that needs to be done.

It was also mentioned that not all support staff know if there are funds available for PD. There needs to be clarification at school levels that funds are set aside and support staff can request PD for approval.

P. Cocks reported on a recent survey of principals on PD funds. The budgets for PD funds will continue to be a site-based decision but there may be a recommendation from Division office that professional development for all staff be included in the schools' three year plans.

### 3.3 Professional Learning Communities

The transition to the Shortgrass Library System has created PLC opportunities for librarians. The meetings have been very valuable and librarians would like to see them continued. School librarians are also willing and eager to assist with Language Arts / English programs in the schools and perhaps they could be included in PLCs for Language Arts / English teachers.

The annual meeting day for school secretaries is very much appreciated. School tours for support staff would be nice to do so that they can learn from each other and get an idea of what is working elsewhere. This would be particularly beneficial for feeder schools. Teacher assistants could spend time with younger grades to get to know

students before they move into the next school. There was a suggestion that TAs could switch places for a day.

G. Westgard and G. Dennis confirmed that the Board has been on school tours this year and they still have a few schools to visit. The tours are valuable for trustees to have a better perspective when school issues are brought up.

### 3.4 Support Staff Evaluations

It was suggested that there be more guidance to schools from central office in support staff evaluations. Some support employees report that they have never been evaluated or have been evaluated by someone who doesn't generally observe their work. Custodians have been evaluated on a regular basis.

P. Cocks agreed to discuss the matter with the Assistant Superintendent who is responsible for Human Resources with a view to establish common evaluation tools for each job category. A combination of a self-evaluation and a growth plan was mentioned as a preferred choice. Principals need to be reminded that evaluations are to be conducted each year. There was discussion on who at the school would be the best person to conduct the evaluation such as the special education teacher, vice principal or principal or a team with input from all staff. Emphasis should be on evaluations as a positive exercise.

### 3.5 Colony Teacher Assistant Representation

A teacher assistant who works in a colony school has suggested that there should be a representative from that group. Employee members of the committee would have no objections to specifically including a colony TA representative. The matter was referred back to the board for consideration.

### 3.6 Term Length for Committee Members

Committee members agreed that there should be staggered terms for committee members to ensure continuity. It was agreed that 2 to 3 years would be appropriate and that employee groups should select their own representatives. The matter will be revisited in a year's time to decide how committee members would be changed.

C. Heidinger reported that each representative sent out a request to their respective groups to provide comments to be brought to the SSBAC. Responses were received from some groups and there were several positive comments. The process is good but employees need to be encouraged to voice their opinion. There may not always be agreement but there will at least be a discussion. Employees may need to be assured that there isn't a risk to bringing concerns forward.

### 3.7 Health and Safety

Support staffs understand the current issues and the necessity for a health and safety plan. The information bulletins from Janine are helpful at the schools. The availability of funds to purchase health & safety equipment (first aid kits) was questioned. There was also a question on who checks to see if schools are in compliance. Is there an audit process? It was suggested that hand sanitizers be purchased for the schools for the front entrance and possibly classrooms.

### 3.8 Inclement Weather

Support staffs accept that all employees are now required to be at work if schools are closed for inclement weather but roads are passable. However, the communication of the decision was a real issue and created some frustration. The ATA agreement was changed and teachers were made aware of it but it was not generally communicated to support staff. It was suggested that language be added to the Employment Agreement to clarify that employees will not be paid for inclement weather days. It was also suggested that an email be sent to all staff in September to remind everyone of the policy on inclement weather days so there are no misunderstandings before there is an inclement weather day.

### 3.9 Communications

Communications could be improved if the email system was used more effectively. Employees should be encouraged to check emails more frequently.

There was a question on what is a reasonable amount of time to wait for response to a request for things to be done. Computers and phone systems were mentioned as an example. It was suggested that workers could address other issues when they are in the schools . not just the ones they planned to do. It was also requested that Technical Assistants return to having regularly scheduled visits so that schools will know when to expect them.

## **4. Future Items for Discussion**

Support staff evaluations and committee membership will be brought back to the next meeting.

## **5. Next Meeting Dates**

The next meeting will be scheduled for October 2009.

## **6. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.