

## **GAC meeting - September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 - Minutes**

### Agenda:

1. Introductions
2. Brief background on the Gifted Program at Northern
3. IPRC / SEPRC extensive delays
4. Update on Return to School and Gifted Courses, especially in Virtual School
5. Elections for GAC Chair
6. Brainstorming about GAC initiatives for this year

### 1. Introductions

- All parents introduced themselves to the group and provided brief backgrounds
- All parents of gifted kids are welcome to receive GAC emails and attend GAC meetings (from any school or any grade), so that they can learn more about the gifted program and Northern.

### 2. Brief background on the Gifted Program at Northern

- The Gifted program at Northern was developed based on extensive, long-standing research that it's better to have larger cohorts and a critical mass of students, so that the peer group and course offerings can be more robust and varied. Unfortunately, TDSB implemented and tried to implement several cuts to Gifted programming over the last handful of years, including raising identification hurdles and thresholds, and changing catchment boundaries to specifically shrink the size of Northern's very large and highly regarded program. Significant parent and advocates' engagement and feedback to TDSB have been instrumental in helping to maintain and protect the gifted program.

### 3. IPRC and SEPRC extensive delays:

- Last May 1<sup>st</sup> TDSB announced that it would not attempt to hold many IPRCs or SEPRCs (or consider them a "priority"), despite two clear memos from the Ministry of Education last spring that the MOE expected all of these processes to be completed as usual before the end of the last school year, even if remotely. As a result, many Gifted and other Special Education students still have not had these processes completed or even scheduled. This means that predictably, these students were not "Identified" or "Placed" in a gifted program or other appropriate setting before the start of this school year. This also means that in order for these students to move into a Gifted or other program, they will have to move in

the middle of a difficult school year, which is very disruptive, or they will have to wait more than a whole year to receive an appropriate placement.

- If anyone hasn't had these processes completed yet, they should promptly send an email to their school Principal to request an IPRC, and the Principal is required to respond within 15 days with an estimated meeting (IPRC) date. Also be sure to continue to proactively follow up with staff to try to expedite these processes.
- If anyone has any questions about the process they should speak to their school's administrators, and/or they can send a confidential email to [northerngifted@gmail.com](mailto:northerngifted@gmail.com).

#### 4. Update on return to school and gifted courses, especially in virtual school

- Monique Cipollone (ACL Gifted Special Education Program) explained the following:
  - o Course offerings should be the same as before (i.e. if they have enough students interested in an elective course the school should offer it).
  - o Parents can check the course code - gifted courses have a 6 at the end of the code. If you notice your child was not offered a gifted level course, connect with the guidance counsellor.
  - o Northern is experiencing staffing reshuffling as teachers across TDSB are being moved out of underpopulated in-person classes, to the virtual teaching environment, due to more students in virtual school than TDSB had anticipated.
  - o Transitions between virtual and in person school from quad to quad will pose challenges to managing the course assignments.
- Melissa states that parents of gifted students are concerned about gifted course offerings for grades 11 and 12, especially for the virtual learning option, as some parents received contradictory information from guidance and other staff. Monique confirms that the same enriched/gifted courses should be offered in the virtual option. Monique will ask Guidance for more clarity around the virtual class gifted offerings and will circle back to Melissa.
- First quad course assignments are locked in already and now guidance has started working on the next quads' course assignments. Courses have already been assigned for the whole year (tentatively) but they might change due to above and therefore the school did not want to share next quads' schedules with the students. However, it seems that some students can see these in either Brightspace or in the new TDSB Connects App/electronic agenda

#### 5. Elections for GAC Chair

- GAC is an independent, volunteer run group of parents who advocate from the students' and parents' perspective, to support better education for students in school and across the school board, and to help parents better understand and support their students at home.
- Melissa has been Chair of GAC for a number of years, and informed, engaged, and mobilized hundreds of parents to oppose TDSB's previous attempt to cancel the gifted

program, as well as to provide feedback and advocate on numerous other ongoing proposed changes to the gifted program and other aspects of education in the TDSB.

- She has also initiated and delivered for gifted parents and for “whole school” events, speakers on a variety of topics including:

- o Supporting your Gifted Teen
- o Study Skills - A to Z (twice)
- o Advanced Placement, Scholarship, and Enrichment evenings (twice)
- o Holistic Approaches to Managing Teen Stress
- o How to Better Manage Teen Stress and Anxiety
- o Teen Substance Use
- o various topics on education
- o etc.

Tania nominates Melissa as Chair and Cathy seconds; all present vote in favour. Melissa continues as Chair of GAC.

#### 6. Brainstorming about GAC initiatives for this year:

- Provide information on ‘Learning Strategies’ and Study Skills focused on challenges and solutions for learning during the pandemic; i.e. more screen time; how to stay focused and organized; reduced contact with peers and teachers for both social / emotional and academic support; how to keep up with the accelerated pace of learning full courses in ten weeks each; etc.
- Melissa will recirculate GAC’s previous excellent presentation (for all types of students) on “Study Skills - A to Z”, to the GAC parents’ email list and to the whole school.

#### What other kinds of topics might we want to cover?

- How to support our grade 9s (and all students) to make friends this year
- How to help ease anxiety during COVID? Materials to circulate or speaker?
- The “Teenage Brain” and mental health first aid

#### How might we connect with other parents, other than via virtual platforms?

Melissa reiterates that GAC needs a variety of parent volunteers to help with various programs, initiatives etc., and volunteers are welcome for all types of involvement and contribution.