

GS Lakie School Council Minutes October 27, 2015

Attendees: Administrators and staff; Doug James, Jeni Halowski, Craig DeJong, Andy Tyslau, Tavis Newman, Jen Robinson, Joe Wright, Gord Smith, Rik Jesse (LSD #51 Director of Technology) Cheryl Gilmore (LSD #51 Superintendent)

Parents: Angela Court, Brian Palsky, Tony Deys, Corinne Steele, Debra Basil, Cam & Carey Leacock, Carl Epp, Cory Dublanko, Danielle Anvik, Dianne Fitzgerald, Katherine Haight, Harry Slomp, Janine Dublanko, Jason Martens, Jenn de Boer, Barry Knapp, Lee Ann Kruger, Marcia Nesch, Mark Lowe, Mark Moland, Melissa Enkirch, Mike Smith, Randy Helm, Rebecca Seely, Tara Yagos, Troy Danyk, Adam Carter

Administrator's Report – Doug James

1. Introduction of staff and special guest Rik Jesse, Director of Technology.
2. Review of the GS Lakie Powercard fundraiser. Proceeds will go toward multi-sport court to begin construction in fall 2018 to coincide with opening of new Westside Middle School. The goal is to raise \$150,000 and apply for matching grants.
3. Middle School conference on Oct. 5th. The three Lethbridge Middle Schools together with LSD Administrators met to discuss Middle School philosophy and pedagogy. The change from Junior High to Middle School happened 13 years ago and it is time to re-evaluate.
4. Nov. 2 is a Professional Learning day where grade level cohorts will meet.
5. Literacy is primary focus at GSL. There is a wide range of reading proficiency levels and a 3 yr plan has been developed to address this gap and introduce new resources. The initiative will be rolled out soon.

Open Discussion

Rik Jesse talked about the district perspective on technology and its importance to our students' learning experience. Devices are part of our lifestyle and we are in the group of parents and students that will influence their transition into the classroom. How do we move from an attitude of limiting devices to fully accepting, integrating and purposefully employing them? If our students are to be competitive in post-secondary and the market place they must have this skill set. Shouldn't we be developing ways for them to acquire these skills rather than developing rules to limit their access?

Out of a School of approx. 900 students and staff, today alone, 792 devices were connected to the GS Lakie wireless network. This doesn't include desktop machines in the classrooms or offices. We don't need to wonder about when these devices are coming, they are already here.

Concerns and Discussion included the following five main areas

1. Appropriateness of use. How will teachers monitor appropriate use? Won't this "policing" take up a huge amount of time. How can we trust that are kids are using them appropriately? Are these devices worth the distraction?

2. Cost. There is pressure on parents to purchase devices. Aren't we just creating a greater gap between students who can and can't afford them? Are students missing out if they don't have a device? The main reason for kids not bringing devices to school is fear of loss or damage. How will schools deal with these concerns? How will the school district be able to afford and support this technology?
3. Skills development. If we focus less on teaching fundamental skills like hand writing, spelling, grammar and basic math what are we potentially losing? The basic skills are being lost, but not necessarily replaced with new skills like proper typing, reliable research and critical thinking techniques. Are kids just being entertained by fun videos or are they actually getting a better learning experience?
4. Cyberbullying. What is the school's policy on cyberbullying? Are there filters in place to prevent inappropriate sites? How is the school liable for on-line activities that happen at school or after school?
5. Communication. Are we getting more or less connected? Are more kids "left out" of social circles because they don't have the newest device? Will kids be getting way too much screen time at school and at home? We all need to "unplug" and increase our physical activity.

Responses included a discussion about how devices are the present and future of communication and we have an opportunity to develop a targeted skill set and best practices to be used in the classroom. Most teachers agree that the information available on-line helps to keep the students engaged and enhances understanding and learning. The world is at our finger tips, why not use it. Devices are powerful tools that do have a place in schools and can be specifically useful for differentiated and blended learning. Their use must be purposeful and guided. We must move from purely consuming information to learning how to produce it.

Rather than a list of punitive rules and procedures we want to create user agreements where students and parents can participate in defining acceptable practice and fully understand their responsibilities. Through helping to create the parameters we will monitor ourselves and each other in this new environment.

The School District does not have a cell phone policy, each school has been left to develop their own. GS Lakie policy; students can access their devices before school, lunch and during breaks. They don't have to be locked away in lockers but must be put away during class time. For planned activities teachers can give students permission to use. Teachers notify Mr. James when they use devices so the frequency and purpose can be tracked. The model of leaving devices face-down on the desk till needed was explained.

Expectations of appropriate use fall under the digital citizenship policy. Cyberbullying is treated as any other case of bullying or student misbehaviour and referred the appropriate disciplinary level.

At GSL students are given computer training through extra core time. Topics include keyboarding, researching techniques, discussions of digital citizenship and what it means to have a digital reputation.

The School District is looking at this issue very carefully and gathering information to help assess whether using technology is the best way to get desired outcomes. We can set as many rules as we want but we need to consider the environment we are trying to create. Social equity and accessibility at school and at home are certainly important factors.

We realize that we are in a transition period and there will be trade-offs. We just want our children to be able to communicate in the best way they can with the world and to have the necessary skills to succeed at post-secondary education and in the work place.

Report from District School Council not discussed at the meeting but presented below for information.

1. DSC is a monthly meeting at the Education Centre with the Superintendent, Trustees and representatives from the 16+ School Councils in School District 51. Provincial and city wide concerns are discussed and ideas shared. A representative is encouraged from each school but all parents are invited to these meetings on the first Monday of the month at 6:30 pm.
2. Estimated total enrollment for SD51 is 10,039 students. This is an increase of 631 students from last year. Most of these are students from the Immanuel Christian Schools which joined the School District this year.
3. Modernization at Wilson Middle School continues, ground was broken for the new elementary school in Copperwood, final approval for funding to commence the west side middle school was received and the schematic design is complete.

Next meetings: Tuesday, Nov. 24th at 6:00 pm. There will be no meeting in December.

Minutes prepared by Corinne Steele, please email with any corrections or additions.