

Gordon Elementary PAC Meeting

Minutes of the **Gordon Elementary PAC** meeting held on Tuesday January 27, 2009 in the library of General Gordon Elementary School.

Present:

Emily Malnis (School Nurse), Nikki (from KidsBooks), Bonnie Barrett (secretary), Ingrid Sulston (PAC Chair), Margaret Davidson (Principal), Noreen Morris (Vice-principal), Anna Johnson (Treasurer), Heather Young (Co-Treasurer), Jane McDougall, Jane Pike, Gail Johnson, Lisa Chambers, Zol Fox, Noushin Akoundsadegh, Staphanie Wasserman, Charlotte French, Diana Schmidt, Elke Porter, Zoe Curylo, D. Curylo, Carmen Rida, Debra Kopelow.

1. Quick Business

Ingrid calls the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

A. Approve Last Meetings Minutes with changes

Heather makes a motion to approve the Minutes from the Gordon Elementary PAC meeting held in November 2009, and Anna seconds the motion.

Carried

B. Make a motion to give teachers a \$100 gift each, for special classroom resources.

Ingrid asked for formal approval to give each teacher at General Gordon a \$100 gift, which was to be used to cover special classroom resources. Anna explained that the PAC traditionally gave all of the teachers a gift of \$100 per division, twice a year, to cover expenses that teachers pay out of their own pockets. Because the \$100 gift per class totals approximately \$2000, it is necessary to bring this up at the PAC meeting in order to approve this in the February PAC meeting. This gift has been done for several years.

Elke calls for a motion to approve a \$100 gift to each of the teachers at General Gordon Elementary School. Lisa made the motion, which was seconded by Diana.

As there were no objections by anyone in attendance, this action is carried.

C. Scholastic book fair during the parent-teacher interviews is cancelled. The lice committee will have a table in the main hallway with an information board and parents who know how to lice check.

Ingrid announced that the PAC had decided to cancel the Scholastic Book Fair which normally happens during the Parent/Teacher Interviews. The Fair doesn't make very much money, and it ends up being a lot of work for parents. Ingrid welcomed any other suggestions to be submitted to the PAC for involvement during the next session of Parent/Teacher Interviews. This is a good opportunity to connect with parents because they all come into the school.

Instead of the book fair, the Lice committee is going to have a table that will be open for questions/awareness during this session of Parent Teacher Interviews. Someone requested that there be books on lice available at this time. The Lice Committee noted that they planned to have a variety of material available that had been provided by Emily, (the school nurse); as well as a sheet with some contact and support if you suspect your child might be affected. The committee was also planning to come up with a Lice life cycle diagram to have up, and some *real* samples. The Lice Committee will also be teaching people how to check their children for nits weekly. Since classes resumed in January there have been at least three cases reported. It is very important that parents check their kids every week. If anyone is willing to volunteer at this table there will be various shifts which will need to be filled throughout the Interview Session.

D. Grocery Card Sales

Diana Schmidt encouraged everyone to get involved in the Grocery Card Sales fundraiser, explaining that this is an easy way to generate funds for the school, using money you would be spending on your household groceries anyway.

Diane reported that she was organizing this Fundraiser, and information is available if you are interested in participating. There are order forms available in the school office (on the counter), and Diane is looking for a place to set up promotions somewhere in the hallway. The forms can also be downloaded from the school website. Please email/call Diane Schmidt if you have any questions or concerns.

E. FSA tests,

Margaret explained that FSA tests will be conducted in classrooms over the next couple of weeks. This will affect grade four students and grade seven students. Margaret explained that parents have a choice to allow their children to participate; and added that the school has excluded kids that it may prove stressful for; including those who are still learning English or who have been diagnosed with various learning disabilities.

Margaret recommended that parents considering FSA testing should encourage their children to practice the tests online. Students can't ask for help while the tests are being conducted, so it is a good idea if they understand the test before they actually have to do it.

Margaret explained that they are also anticipating that there may be some difficulty conducting the tests, because portions of the tests are conducted online. The School Board has been having troubles with all of the computers (throughout the district) because the network has been infected by a virus. The School Board is working their way through various workgroups to remove the infection. Hopefully this will be cleared up before the testing begins.

Everyone was cautioned not to use their personal memory sticks/USB storage devices on any of the school computers until all our computers are given a clean bill of health.

F. Jump Math

John Mighton, the founder of Jump Math, is speaking at Lord Tennyson tomorrow night. Margaret explained that some of Gordon Elementary teachers are already using Jump Math in their classrooms, and the exciting thing about this program is that it covers both gifted and learning disabled students. This program is catching on really quickly, because even though Jump Math is completely optional, there are many different math resources that will cover the curriculum.

G. Talent Show

Parents aren't all around/aware of the change of the date for the talent show. **Talent show** - Students audition with their talent, and put on an evening performance for parents. (March 12th 2009).

H. Building Club.

There has been a "Building Club" implemented for building with kids, and everyone is welcome to attend. The Building Club meets on Wednesday afternoons, and is currently being held (in rotation) at the houses of children who belong to the club, with an emphasis on Lego. Eventually this will be held in a more permanent location within the school, but this may be a potentially costly endeavor because all the Lego and building materials must be procured and stored. This club is a great way to engage children in learning together, and would particularly useful for those who aren't actively engaged in team sports.

2. Body Science (sex education) discussion

Margaret began the discussion with a basic overview of the curriculum that was taught to students within the realm of career and health education. She explained that there were six strands taught at various levels of depth and understanding throughout the grades including: Goals & Decisions, Career Development, Health and Healthy Living, Safety & Injury Prevention, and substance Misuse Prevention.

Depending upon the level of understanding these strands are taught in various ways.

For example, when teaching health and healthy living in kindergarten or grade one, a teacher may put sparkles on her hands and explain scientifically and simplistically how the sparkles are like germs and demonstrate how quickly and easily germs are spread throughout the classroom.

In grade two students are taught basic goal setting skills, encouraging them to do their best. They are also taught the meaning of various safety and street signs, and introduced to a chef of the day; whereby various parents come in and help, engaging the children to make healthy food choices.

In grade three children study choice theories, are encouraged to make their own decisions. Grade three students are also educated about fire safety, there is a fire house brought to the school to teach children how to react to reduce harm in emergency situations.

Students in grades four and five are taught junior body science in four sessions. Other programs that are run out of Gordon Elementary is the renowned "Friends for Life", a school-based early intervention and prevention program, proven to be effective in building resilience and reducing the risk of anxiety disorders in children. It teaches children how to cope with fears and worries and equips them with tools to help manage difficult situations, now and later in life.

Grade Six students are educated about the basics of bullying, and internet safety. They are also informed of different family situations, encouraged with proactive decision making, and various facets of the human reproductive system. At this point in time some discussion is made with regards to life-threatening communicable diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

In grade seven students participate in a career fair, and are included in various programs including HeartSmart for Kids, and Act Now BC – which encourages healthy eating and physical activities.

Margaret reported that students also participate in programs designed to prevent sexual abuse. In grades 1-3 there is a "Feeling No" program, and in grades four and five there is a program to prevent violence called "SECOND STEP" which provides students with strategies to use against bullies, and how to handle self esteem issues. Margaret noted that teachers do require special training to broach topics of sexual abuse, because in the event that a child discloses, the teacher in charge needs to know how to handle it.

Margaret introduced **Emily Malnis** and explained that Gordon Elementary is fortunate to have such a fabulous community nurse, who attends PAC meetings, and student council sessions. Every single teacher at Gordon has signed up to have her come into their classes, to teach Body Science, and we are really lucky to have her.

Emily Malnis reported that is was Gordon Elementary's school nurse, as well as a public health nurse, with her own office in Kerrisdale. Emily is the school nurse for several schools within the community.

One of Emily's (many) jobs is to assist with health and safety teaching in the classrooms of the schools that she is involved with. All the students from kindergarten to grade seven require someone outside of the teachers to bring a cohesive program to teach the curriculum and inform parents about the teaching program. Emily explained that everything that is laid out within the government curriculum does not cover everything your kids will need to know.

Emily explained that students refer to Sex Education as Body Science. She noted that sometimes a child will ask questions outside of the curriculum, and explained that if a student asks a question in class she answers their inquiries in scientific terms with nice simple answers. Emily noted that there were five stages of sexual development; so there are different ways to approach topics with students based upon what stage they are in.

Emily encouraged parents to bring up subjects that are discussed in classes with their children. What educators discuss in school is really a viable tool to jumpstart conversations at home. A school nurse gives students basic scientific information, and as a parent you can discuss your own morals and values and use the discussions as an opportunity to teach your children to be safe.

Why we educate children at a young age:

Education promotes sexual maturity. When children are young, they are still open and accepting. If we remain silent about these topics at young ages, the silence teaches that sexual health is taboo.

In the past, sexuality was considered secret, dirty, and for adults only. When you present information to children at a young age you teach them that it is not shameful to discuss these topics.

Knowledge is protection. Meg Hickling, a retired nurse who is a guru of teaching sex in schools, has done research on this and as a result created the “five stages of sexual development”.

Sex offenders target vulnerable children. Educated children are more likely to tell their parents if someone tries to take advantage of them, as such, educated children are less likely to be taken advantage of.

Educated teens make less risky choices and are generally less promiscuous.

Sexual Education takes time – children need time to absorb the scientific information and pair it with family values, morality and theology. In this way, you have a chance to provide the moral and ethical cues you want your child to understand along with the scientific facts.

Teaching how conception occurs is not the same as teaching your children to have sex. In school it is very carefully explained that intercourse is in *adult* activity.

Emily Malnis explained what would be taught at the various grade levels:

In kindergarten to grade three students are taught the scientific names for body parts (urine, stool, penis testicles, anus, vagina, and uterus.) Students are also taught that the three private areas of the body, and are educated about inappropriate touching, how to feel safe, and who to talk to if they feel that they have been violated. Students at this level are also taught about body ownership. Finally primary students are encouraged not to ever pick up needles or condoms, and it is explained to them that the repercussions of doing so can be life threatening or deadly. If students ask why they shouldn't touch these items it is explained that any contact with these items can make you really, really sick, and can be really, really harmful. At this stage it is not discussed germs may actually be in there, but it is stressed that this is a very unsafe activity.

In grades four and five students are taught the same things the primary students are, in more depth, and then discussions are made about the physical changes they can anticipate or may already be experiencing. Students are also educated about proper hygiene at this time.

Grade six and seven students are taught everything that primary and intermediate students are discussing, with the inclusion of discussions about healthy and unhealthy relationships, personal safety, and boundaries. Students at this level are also taught the responsibilities that can be associated with a sexual relationship, and the importance of taking responsibility for your own sexual health.

Some parents were concerned that these classes were taught with boys and girls together. Emily explained that students had a conversation with their teachers first, but noted that typically when boys and girls are educated together it forces them to behave more maturely. Emily added that she planned to do the first session separating the boys and the girls, but the second session of Body Science would be co-ed.

Emily explained the “Five Stages of Sexual Maturity) as per Meg Hickling:

The first stage is made up of “Magical thinkers” (ages 2-4).

“Magical thinkers” make up stories when they don't have factual information, they need information repeated several times, they have no emotional baggage (they have a healthier view of things), and they accept information in a matter of fact way.

It is important to teach “Magical Thinkers the scientific names for the genitals; including penis, testicles, scrotum, anus, vulva, labia, vagina, clitoris, uterus, ovaries. They can understand basic statements like “reproduction happens when a man's sperm joins a woman's ovum by sexual intercourse.” It should be explained to them that a baby grows in the uterus (not in the tummy), that the baby is born thru the vagina.

Magical thinkers should also be taught the basics of menses and nocturnal emissions, so that they come to view it as a clean and healthy process. Children aged 2 to 4 should be taught that they should NEVER pick up needles and condoms.

The second stage is “The bathroom humor types” (primaries, grades 1-3)

“The bathroom humor types” often confuse the digestive and reproductive systems, which turns everything into bathroom humor. This probably occurs because we have historically taught children that a woman has an egg in her stomach, and a man has a seed.

Bathroom humor types display a mechanical curiosity; they want to know the physical side of how things work. This makes it possible to teach them successfully with scientific facts. This age group also has the ability to ask questions without shame or hesitation. They accept the information they are given and move on. This is the perfect age to be teaching them more and more about sexual health. When they are taught early on they already understand the scientific process by the time they get to asking questions about these things. Students are taught additional scientific words, including: urine, stool, bladder, and urethra. Students are also taught the distinction between the digestive and reproductive systems. Older students at this level are given a more full description of menses and nocturnal emissions.

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH THESE TOPICS AT HOME:

- Never lose your sense of humour
- If you are concerned about a question your child asks; gently ask where they heard about that word or activity.
- Remember that if they are old enough to ask the question - they are old enough to hear the answer. It's just how big of an answer do you give them.
- Bedtime is a good time
- Praise maturity
- Set expectations for good manners – remember they won't always get it right.

**Teaching sexual health can be a contentious issue. The School Board doesn't accept sexual health as the same thing as physical health. It is important for parents to be aware that the current curriculum as stated does not cover all of these aspects. Currently, Emily plans to teach within the curriculum, but should the school decide to teach things outside of the curriculum, we would require permission forms from parents to do so.

A parent questioned Emily to see if a child might ask mechanical type questions because something has happened to them. Emily explains that it is at this age that sexual abuse can come out verbally. She added that sometimes these questions come up because of things a student has heard at school, or they may ask you hypothetical questions about something they themselves have experienced but do not feel comfortable discussing. Emily noted that parents should be really careful of the responses given to children about tricky questions, if your response makes them less comfortable, they may decide not to discuss these items with you anymore. A good way to respond when these sorts of questions are brought up is “Oh that's an interesting question, where did you hear that from” and remember to ask them *gently*. Make sure you don't make them feel unsafe about talking about it.

Emily explained that key things to watch out for in abused children are: shying away from certain people that they used to hang out with, not wanting to be left alone, becoming abnormally clingy, and not wanting to engage in activities that they previously enjoyed.

It is also really important to teach children prevention. It is important to teach them about their three private areas, and to let them know that it is safe to tell you about things that anyone might do to make them uncomfortable. Sexual abuse usually occurs with someone that the child already knows.

The third level of maturity is “The Gross Me Outers” (intermediates – grades 4-7)

“The Gross Me Outers” are the most curious about sexual health, and this is the last chance to teach children about sexual health. They are already busy developing their own set of personal boundaries, and wanting their own privacy.

This age group is fascinated by pregnancy, miscarriages, handicaps, abnormalities, multiples, and congenitally joined twins. It is very important to teach them correct and factual terms to avoid misconceptions. (i.e. pregnancy can occur by “sleeping together” – can be easily misinterpreted at this age). It is also important to give children of this age information about puberty and hygiene. Use unpacking groceries as a teachable moment, ask your girls to help you put away tampons and feminine hygiene products to teach them about these items, their uses, and that the products themselves are not shameful.

This age group is also educated about several body changes that can be expected at puberty. They are given basic information about STI's, and this group is very curious about STI's, and they tend to really worry about them. It is important to teach them about safety and how they are transmitted so that students don't worry about getting terrible diseases from toilet seats.

Emily also takes this opportunity to teach children of this age about the false and exaggerated sexuality that is portrayed in pornography and the exploitation of pornography's participants. It is important to teach children that they do not have to be sexually active as teenagers. It is also helpful to bring up the distorted, popularized, commercialized view of the “perfect body”, at this time. Emily teaches these subjects to both boys and girls, and the effects of the media and the distorted reality of “perfect bodies”. This way she can also teach them to be ok with the natural processes of their own bodies. Emily encouraged parents to watch “America's Next Top Model” with your children, it will give you an opportunity to have open and honest discussions you're your children about distorted body images.

Someone asked Emily to discuss some of the symptoms of Anorexia, or other eating disorders. Emily explained that symptoms included: not wanting to eat, covering up the refusal to eat certain things with argument about how the food was prepared, drastic weight loss, excessive comments about their weight, excessive exercise, and constantly trying to keep up with unrealistic fashion photography.

One parent was concerned about discussions involving homosexual relationships, and whether this is discussed in “Body Science” at this level. Emily explained that this was only discussed as a type of relationship. Discussing homosexuality is more about teaching students tolerance. Typically students want to know about the mechanics of it, but it rarely goes into the relationship aspect of homosexuality.

Emily reiterated that teaching children about sex does not mean that you are telling them to have sex. This is the last opportunity for students to study “Body Science” before grade ten, so it is important to touch on all of these things.

The fourth stage is “The people who don't know that they don't know” (teens in grade 7-12)

“The people who don't know that they don't know” think it is not cool to ask questions. At this stage they may need to read books or some other private way to learn about sexuality. They want to talk, and will if you attempt to make it more comfortable, and put the information out there. Allow your kids know that they can talk about these topics with you. “The people who don't know that they don't know” are more likely to engage in risky behaviour if they are not educated.

Topics that are discussed with students at this age include: the proper use of contraceptive devices and their potential failure (eventually when you want to be in a sexual relationship, what are the responsibilities that are involved.). It is important not to vilify birth control pills to young adults because contraceptives can be used for things besides preventing pregnancy. Oral contraceptives work to control acne, and to regulate periods, and has several other uses. Students at this level are given detailed information about STI's; including where they are contracted and how they are contracted. At this stage it is important to work to develop an understanding of intimate relationships; relationship skills; refusal skills; and confidence when going to a doctor.

TIPS TO DISCUSSING THESE TOPICS WITH THIS AGE GROUP:

- Talk to them in the car – they can't escape
- Play the "what if" game ("What if you were in the mall and one of your friends was trying to convince you to shoplift" – This allows your children to work out healthy ways to avoid uncomfortable, unsafe scenarios before they are swept up by them in the moment).
- Set limits they foster a sense of safety and security
- When making plans, ask them to be specific (Ask questions about their whereabouts: "Will there be adults there", "When can I expect you to be home", "I need to know when to worry, and when not to worry. It's not that I do not trust you as my child, but I need to know that I don't need to worry."
- Call me if you need me and I promise I will not be mad, no matter where you are or what you are doing. (People are allowed to make mistakes because they learn something, don't be mad at them.)

The final stage is the sexually mature adult.

Sexually mature adults are comfortable with their own bodies and the exams conducted by doctors. Healthy sexually mature adults experience no exploitation or abuse in their relationships, and demonstrate a respect and understanding of society's laws, taboos, and boundaries around sexual behaviours.

MORE IMPORTANT TIPS FOR DISCUSSING BODY SCIENCE WITH YOUR CHILDREN:

- Using scientific terms for all body parts is important
 - When scientific terms are used with children from an early age; parents are more comfortable with the scientific terms by the time children start asking questions
 - Practice using scientific terms by yourself with your partner.
- Answer questions as they come up
 - Do not wait until your child asks to share information. They may never ask and this can send the message that the topic is taboo or off limits
 - Talk until their eyes glaze over. They will take in what they can/need to.
 - Know that the information will need to be repeated and reviewed.
- Talks don't have to be an hour long every time something comes up.
- Don't be mad at questions your child may ask
- Bedtime is a good time for discussion – they feel safe.
- Praise maturity – I'm really proud of you for coming and asking that question."
- Set expectations for good manners – remember they won't always get it right.
- Getting your kids involved in after-school activities decreases the likelihood of getting involved in early sexual relationships.
- If your philosophy is to teach your children that it is not appropriate to be having sex (period), then at least inform them about the resource they have in youth clinics where they can get information on how to do it safely. There are free clinics all over the city, which are inclusive of a group of doctors and nurses, they are free to students under the age of 25, and provide oral contraceptives, I.U.D.'s, STI testing, and PAP tests. http://www.vch.ca/community/youth_clinics.htm

SAMPLE RESPONSES TO PROMOTE HEALTHY ATTITUDES:

"I don't know the answer to that, but lets find out together. "

I need time to think about this. I promise we will talk bout it after (ex. Supper)"

"My parents never talked about this with me, but I'm really proud that you asked me and I'm going to do the best to answer your question."

"I am really proud of you for asking this question and I know that you are grown up enough to have a scientific answer. But perhaps it would not be a good idea to go to school tomorrow and tell everyone what we've talked about. Some parents like to tell their children themselves and their children haven't asked them yet."

"If you want to know more sometime, be sure to ask me again. I'm really proud of you and your question".

“They may never have sexual intercourse but they will always have bodies to care for and sexual health is no different than nutritional health” – Meg Hickling

CHOOSING BOOKS AND RECOMMENDED READING:

“Boys, Girls and Body Science” Meg Hickling – recommended reading for younger kids. (4-6)

“The Care and Keeping of You – the Body Book for Girls”

It's a good idea to hand a book to a child and let them go thru it for the first time on their own. Then once they have done that you can read through it with them at which point they can ask questions. Having a book there will help to avoid direct eye contact -which can be awkward.

Choose books that use proper language. Don't give them books that aren't factual, because you'll just have to go thru the whole process again.

“It's so amazing” and “It's perfectly normal”

These books have sections dedicated to several different things including: strong feelings, hormones, birthing process. These books are great because you don't have to sit down and read an entire book.

Make those books available in your home for your child to discover on their own. When you notice your child has taken an interest in these resources on their own then you can have some more in depth discussions about them.

RECOMMENDED VIDEOS:

“What kids want to know about sex and growing up” (Grade 6 students)

Your public library is a great resource. There is stuff out there. The PAC has compiled a list of reading on the school website which have all been well reviewed and/ recommended personally.

Emily will be teaching in Gordon classrooms starting Friday January 30th for three weeks. It has been recommended that you try and find out when your child will have Emily in their classes, so that appropriate discussions of these topics can be broached at home. It was also suggested that any parents with students from Kindergarten to grade three are welcome to come into the classroom (assuming you can get the teachers permission) while these Body Science sessions are being taught. It is not possible after grade three as students begin to be more modest and shy and are less likely to be free with asking questions if their parents are around.

Emily agreed to post some of the most frequently asked questions (and answers) to the Gordon Website, as well as her Power Point Presentation (presented at the meeting).

Ingrid thanked Kidsbooks for coming to the PAC meeting to provide parents in attendance with resources on these topics.

As there was no further business, the meeting was called to a close at 8:45 PM.