



School Advisory Council Annual Report – June 2023

School	St. Agnes Junior High
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Please list SAC members including names, membership type (i.e., parent, community member, staff), and role (i.e., Chair, Vice Chair).

Chair: Joanna Mills-Flemming
Secretary: Wesaam Alwi
Parent: Susan MacKay
Parent: Natasha Fletcher
Parent: Trish Estabrooks
Staff member: Jarrett Feeney
Staff member: Sara Bonin
Staff Member: Jill Maclean
Staff Member: Rhonda McLean
Community Member: Natalia Diaz-Insense
Community Member: Ian Shaw Cross
Community Member: Alan Jazic/ Jordan Sheppard

Please describe a summary of work undertaken by the SAC to improve student achievement and school performance.

The importance of well-being and inclusive education cannot be overstated when it comes to improving student performance. For students to thrive academically, they must feel physically, emotionally, and mentally healthy. Additionally, students must feel included, valued, and respected within their learning environments.

When students feel happy, safe, and supported, they are more likely to engage in their learning, demonstrate positive behavior, and achieve better academic outcomes. Moreover, an inclusive educational environment that acknowledges and embraces diversity and individual differences can help to reduce stigma, bias, and discrimination, which can impact student performance.

With this understanding, the School Advisory Council identified student well-being as the keystone to student success and partnered with the school to identify and implement high leverage strategies. Members shared in the belief that well-being must be supported through respect for the diverse identities and strengths within our student population and that the school environment plays an integral role in supporting both learning and inclusion.

Student Safety

Over the last year, SAC members have noted an increase in criminal activity in the West end of Halifax. While not directly attributed to our students, the proximity of our building to the Halifax Shopping Center and Mumford Road Transit Station have resulted in instances of vandalism, assaults and drug use on and around the property. This concern was echoed in a recent Public School Parents Facebook group who determined that correlations/patterns exist in the crime data related to the schools inside Halifax Regional Municipality. Specifically, the group wanted to understand the nature and rate of crime occurring within various distances of schools. Unfortunately, the group identified St. Agnes as one of the schools with the highest average police calls for assault per month within 200 meters.

In response to concerns, our SAC placed student safety as a focus for the academic year. To support a full understanding of the problem and to formulate an appropriate action plan, the SAC chose to expand membership to include community stakeholders including HRP, Metro Transit and Halifax Shopping Center security. After reviewing data provided by police and analyzing the Student Success Survey the team identified areas requiring attention which included improved visibility and security as well as improved communication between school and community members. Over the course of the year the team has successfully advocated and fundraised for the installation of ten security cameras in and around the school property and have replaced exterior lighting with higher wattage LED lighting. Additionally, communication has been improved between business owners and the school, providing increased opportunity to share concerns in real time.

Community Partnerships

Perhaps the greatest area of growth for teachers this year was in collaboration. In developing our shared why, our staff determined that we needed to shift our thinking with respect to how our parents were involved in the learning process. To provide more equitable and inclusive practices, we embraced the belief that parents needed to be viewed as learning partners, especially those who are new to Nova Scotia.

A successful home-school partnership working depends on the development of mutual trust and respect between school members. As such, SAC members stressed the importance of creating opportunities for parents to take their place alongside educators to create a more accessible and inclusive school environment.

One way that the SAC supported school-community partnership was through the construction of information sessions for new Canadians. At the beginning of each term, staff members hosted an evening session to support families in understanding processes related to their children's education. Discussion points varied depending on the time of the year and included understanding grading & outcomes, accessing PowerSchool, and understanding graduation requirements. Time was also provided to answer questions and to determine needs of community members. To facilitate the process, the school arranged for childcare and translators to be available on site.

As a result of these meetings, staff noted several improvements. An increase in awareness by the parents and a better understanding of the cultural variables influencing student success improved the learning process. Parents who felt welcomed and validated were more likely to support the school with behaviours and attendance while teachers developed a stronger understanding of their student's learner profile. While there is still more work to do, the SAC has successfully supported the school in developing a culture that is more inclusive for students and their families

Breakfast Club

Food insecurity amongst our student population is a growing and concerning reality. As we know, when students are hungry or malnourished, it can be difficult for them to focus in class, retain information, and engage in learning activities. This can lead to poor academic performance, absenteeism, and other negative outcomes

Over the last two years, our SAC has prioritized the growth of our school breakfast and has supported the school in providing equitable access to healthy, nutritious food. Council members have been instrumental in fundraising and partnering with our local businesses to purchase food, equipment, and supplies for the breakfast program. Moreover, members have been supportive with their time, volunteering throughout the week to prepare grab and go options for students. As a result of these efforts, the school breakfast club has played an important role in promoting the health, well-being, and academic success of students who are experiencing food insecurity. By providing access to nutritious food and a supportive environment, these clubs can help ensure that all students can thrive.

Please list any significant milestones and success stories that the SAC would like to highlight.

Responsiveness to Student Success Survey

The Student Success Survey has been an important piece of data in determining where we can improve the school experience and well being for our students and measure the effectiveness of different approaches and supports.

In reviewing the results of the survey, one area that was highlighted by the SAC as concerning was that 70% of students agreed or strongly agreed that boredom/ lack of interest was a reason why students didn't pay attention in class.

The SAC felt that the learning space is an important aspect of the whole educational experience and that the classroom environment should mirror what students will encounter in their future careers, spaces where and collaboration, problem solving, and meaning making are at the forefront. As such the SAC supported the purchase of conferencing table, doodle top desks and flexible seating in English and Math spaces. In determining the impact of educational furniture teachers noted that it fostered the personalized, collaborative learning environment their students craved and believed that students were more attentive and more likely to participate in discussions. Additionally, teachers felt that the conferencing tables provided increased opportunity to investigate student knowledge, assess students through conversation and facilitated occasions to provide reinforcement and/or enrichment of skills. Overall the provision of flexible learning spaces helped to create a more meaningful, impactful learning experience for our students.

Art & Inclusion

Reclaiming the walls

Rooted in the Inclusive Education Policy, the SAC supported the continuation of an art initiative to have our school walls celebrate the diversity of our school community and to better reflect the lived experiences of our students. The Reclaiming the Walls started with the installation of a mural reflecting our Arabic speaking students in Canada and this year we have two new installations. Our first mural is a celebration of diversity with a specific focus on our BIPOC students. Students came up with the design of having their hands reaching in from the border with cultural or current items of significance. The hands will be painted a variety of skin tones to reflect the diversity of the people attending the school. The goal of this mural is to show students, staff and the community that students come from many different places, but are a community to be recognized and celebrated.

Our second mural has an Indigenous theme with a focus on wisdom and teachings. The mural is being designed by several of our indigenous identifying Grade 7 students and aims to celebrate indigenous traditions and culture as something that is prioritized on our community's land at St. Agnes, despite Canada's history.

Shared we photography project

Over the last five years, St. Agnes has continued to see growth in our newcomer population. While many of our students have thrived and experienced success, the SAC and staff expressed a desire to better support the transition for students to their new community.

The shared we photography initiative was designed to develop art that reflects the bodies, brains and lived experiences of our students in ways that celebrate and bring students to a more complex understanding of who we are as a school. Upon its inception, the SAC facilitated the process through fundraising and facilitating school-community partnerships.

Through this initiative, newcomer and EAL students learned the principles of photography and used them to capture the essence of their new community while learning how to navigate and communicate in that world. They will choose a theme for a literacy level text that will be beneficial to other newcomer students. Upon collecting photos that “tell a story”, students wrote an English or dual lingual informational book aimed at teaching others about this aspect of the community.

The shared we initiative also supported conversations about what community is and extending knowledge of others communities in order to reduce tensions and misunderstandings between the diverse populations. For that reason, a diverse cross section of students were shown basic photography skills and provided with opportunities to take photos that represented “community”. The photographs were then printed and hung in the school, used to make slideshows and will be used to make more art to reflect that idea that we come from many places to make a single community.

By turning diverse communities into art, all communities can be seen in new lights.

Guest speakers

As part of our review of the Student Success Survey, SAC members noted under relationships at school that 57% of respondents felt that they didn’t belong because “people don’t get me”. To better support our students and to further strengthen our focus on well-being, the SAC felt that the school needed to provide additional opportunities to hear from community members with diverse lived experience. As such, the school created several opportunities for guest speakers and community support groups to meet with our students.

Kolade Boboye was our first guest speaker who helped kick start our recognition of African Heritage Month. Kolade is a proud African Nova Scotian man who was evidently delighted to be able to speak to the students about his life so far, the success of Hope Blooms, and the life lessons he embraces which propel him to work hard, be strong, and give back to community. He encouraged our students to consider that they don’t have to wait until they are adults to make positive change in their own lives and their community.

Shahin Mohammadi visited St. Agnes in the Spring to speak to students about the power of positivity. As a teacher turned actor promoted the message that through persistence, hard work, and saying "yes...and", students can achieve astonishing levels of success. Shahin addressed the positive power using the basic rules of improvisation can have on people’s

everyday lives. He broke this concept down for the students by having volunteers participate in quick and entertaining demonstrations, then reinforced the points he was making so the students began to understand that we get out of our lives what we are willing to put into them. By being courageous, and saying “yes” even when we are nervous, we can open up opportunities for success, creativity, meeting wonderful people, and so many more possibilities.

Later in the Spring our focus on well-being culminated in a conference day for the school. The goal of the event was to recognize and support the lived experiences of our students and to encourage them to understand the interconnectedness of mind, body and spirit. Through an exciting roster of community members contributing their time and expertise to our conference students participated in break-out sessions of their choice There was a wonderful including Intro to Circus Arts, 2SLGBTQIA+ session, Hip Hop Dance, Improv Acting, Coding Workshop, Healthy Relations Talks, Indigenous Art Studio, Nature Walk, Recreation in the Gym, Sports on the Field, Creative Writing Workshop, Yoga! Many students found themselves trying something new, discovering a new interest, and these workshops allowed students the opportunity to meet students from other classes and grades.

Please describe any related sub-committee work undertaken by SAC members (e.g., School Options Committee).

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Statements of Revenues and Expenditures:

Expenditures supporting the school improvement plan (e.g., providing resources to support math and literacy instruction).

Whiteboards for 5 Classrooms – \$1938.00
2 x Clover Shaped Whiteboard Tables - \$1068.67
Grade 7 Field Trip to Pier 21 - \$338.22
LCD Projector Remote Clickers \$411.25
Grade 8 Bowling Trip \$800 – Estimate \$800, Will know final total next week.
Family Studies Supplies \$156.99
Learning Center Costs \$116.61

Expenditures supporting policy development and implementation (e.g., supporting and promoting new policies).

Expenditures covering operational expenses; up to 20 per cent of provincial SAC funding may be used as operational expenses, if necessary, to encourage and support member participation).

Please return to School Supervisor by Monday, June 20, 2022. Thank you.