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Erika Lougheed, Chair

Craig Myles, Director of Education

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The April 9, 2024 **Committee of the Whole Public Session** of the Near North District School Board was held in person at the Head Office and via a Zoom video and/or teleconference.

**Trustees Present:**

Ashley St. Pierre, Vice Chair  
Howard Wesley  
Bill Steer ®  
Chantal Phillips  
Jeanie Fuscaldo  
Julie Bertram ®  
Louise Sargent  
Shane Hall  
Albany Benson, Student Trustee  
Dora Chen, Student Trustee

**Administrative Staff Present:**

Gay Smylie, Superintendent (Director designate)  
Seija Van Haesendonck, Superintendent of Business  
Timothy Graves, Superintendent ®  
Deb Bartlett, Communications Officer  
Maureen Egan, Executive Assistant  
Glenn Morrison, Manager IT

**Other:**

Staff, Union partners, media, and community partners

**Regrets:**

Craig Myles, Director of Education  
Melanie Gray, Superintendent of Education

® attended remotely via Zoom video or audio conference

**1.0 Call to Order**

Vice-Chair St. Pierre called the Committee of the Whole meeting to order at 6:00 pm. Superintendent of Education Gay Smylie was identified as Director Designate for the meeting.

**1.1 Land acknowledgement**

Chair Lougheed read the declaration aloud.

**1.2 Attendance**

Attendance indicated that 9 trustees were present, including the one Student Trustee.

**1.3 Declaration of Conflict of Interest nil**

**2.0 In-Camera**

At approximately 6:05 pm, Vice Chair St. Pierre advised the Committee of the Whole would be moving into a private session. Members of the public were excused

and advised they would be permitted back into the meeting once the Board arose in public session.

Motion: CW 2024 04 01 H.Wesley/B.Steer

That the Board move into a Committee of the Whole Private Session in order to discuss items pertaining to *The Education Act* R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2 section 207(2)(b). - CARRIED.

A brief pause was noted to coordinate the appropriate video conference controls and allow staff and community members time to exit the meeting room. Trustees attending virtually were reminded to secure their space as well to ensure confidentiality.

**3.0 Arise and Report**

At approximately 6:10 pm, the Committee arose and reported in the public session of the Committee of the Whole. A brief pause was noted to coordinate the appropriate video conference controls to permit members of the public to re-enter the virtual meeting and open the physical meeting space for in-person guests to re-enter.

**4.0 Approval of the Agenda**

Trustees were referred to the agenda included in the agenda package.

Motion: CW 2024 04 02 B. Steer/H.Wesley

That the agenda for the Committee of the Whole meeting of April 9, 2024, be approved. - CARRIED.

**5.0 Review of Previous Minutes**

Motion: CW 2024 04 03 S.Hall/J.Bertram

That the minutes for the Committee of the Whole meeting of March 19, 2024 be approved as amended. The amendment being the identification of Gay Smylie as Director designate and the edits to 6.1 School Openings Closures Administrative Guideline paragraph two, second sentence deletion of “and the Chair”; new third sentence “The Chair was also present” and deletion of the word “made” in the last sentence. – CARRIED.

**6.0 Business Arising**

**6.1 Staffing Crisis**

Vice-Chair St. Pierre asked Director designate Smylie to introduce this agenda item.

G. Smylie welcomed and thanked Rob Hammond - president ETFO, Parker Robinson - president OSSTF permanent and occasional, Troy Simkins - president OSSTF ESSP, Margaret Soroye - president ETFO occasional, Trevor Russell - president CUPE and Sean Ruddy - Chair of our Principals’ Council for attending this evening and expressed her gratitude for their support of Near North District School Board staff as we face this pervasive staffing crisis. She noted their diligence, thoughtfulness, and passion and applauded them in their honourable and commendable work.

She advised that unfortunately Director Myles' could not be in attendance and asked her to read the following report.

*I am inspired and impressed by all NNDSB staff across the system who are showing courage and passionate conviction in ensuring achievement, equity, safety, and wellbeing of NNDSB students. Across the province, staffing shortages are occurring all employee groups of the education sector including but not limited to: bus drivers, office and operational staff, custodial staff, educational assistants, early childhood educators, and educational assistants, teachers, administrators, varied support staff, mental health and special education experts. This issue impacts student safety, day-to-day operations, quality of education, access to education, implementation of ministry initiatives and overall well-being of students, parents, families, and staff across the system. The burden has far-reaching implications as all staff attempt to mitigate circumstances amongst increased public scrutiny and demands for data from a growing variety of sources. The crisis affects all staff as they make formidable efforts to fill vacancies in a current reality where absenteeism is increasing at an alarming rate. The crisis causes added stress on human resources, union stewards and mental wellness staff who are suffering shortages of their own, all while making valiant efforts to support achievement and wellbeing for all. It's a vicious cycle. BUT I NEED TO SAY THAT THE NNDSB STAFF ARE A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH, IN NAVIGATING THIS CYCLE. Staff are making heroic efforts to ensure the quality of care and engagement in learning that our students deserve despite situations that threaten burnout and an increase in emerging student behaviours. They support their peers and students with grit and grace. When I visit in schools, despite the burdens I continue to see smiling staff and student faces, laughter, engagement, and joy in learning in a safe and clean environment. I was just at Vincent Massey where a fantastic young student named Matt graciously allowed me to crush him in a game of badminton. He was unaware of the struggles of staff. While at the school, I also ran into Charlie who is one of the Custodians who graduated from the NNDSB Custodial Certification Program that was initiated in 2023 in an attempt at outside of the box thinking to mitigate growing needs in creative ways. I've learned that one of our senior custodial staff is even taking it upon himself to drive this new member of the staff to the workplace regularly to ensure his success. These are the kind of efforts our staff make selflessly every day. There is a plan to renew this program and I know that we are also investigating further programming to support staffing needs in many areas. I also believe that we are one of very few boards who are engaged in this kind of creative program development. This is one example of how administration, senior executive and the HR department are doing everything they can to help mitigate the toll this crisis is having on staff. The crisis is taking a toll on them as well. We continue to work with the government to support their on-the-ground understanding of the difficulty we all face in protecting staff and student wellness amidst the crisis. I appreciate the dedication of all staff who are – once again - going above and beyond for their students and their co-workers. I am grateful.*

Vice-Chair St. Pierre thanked G. Smylie for this important report and turned to the board for questions and comments.

Student Trustee Chen expressed her gratitude and sees how far teachers and staff are going for students. She thanked the union presidents for maintaining a safe learning environment.

Trustee Sargent thanked Parker Robinson for taking time today on the phone to answer some of her questions regarding the letter he and the other presidents drafted. She continued noting she understood the recognition Director Myles has given the staff and appreciates it. She asked about the status of the letter received in January that was shared with our co-terminous boards and suggested sending a letter of concern to the MOE rather than waiting on a joint letter with the co-terminous boards. She also

commented that she wanted staff and union partners to understand that when trustees discuss potential ideas they are only brainstorming and discussing and that once at the implementation stage it would be beneficial to include our union partners.

Director designate Smylie explained that during this crisis we are implementing short-term solutions while we continue to strategize long term solutions. Our union partners are very supportive in this regard however we must consider their limitations. The ministry needs to address this with long term solutions for example: adjusting the length of Bachelor of Education degrees; providing a living wage where necessary; accessing our local university and college for recruitment.

Trustee Phillips said she is aware of some boards hiring unqualified teachers and asked if we are considering this. G. Smylie clarified that unqualified does not mean uneducated. She continued that we are not considering this at this time. SBO Van Haesendonck added that we do however use a practice sanctioned by the MOE involving letters of permission.

Each of the union presidents spoke to the tremendous stress their members are facing and asked trustees to look for ways to reduce stress on the system. Parker Robinson explained that he does not view trustees' ideas and initiatives as unimportant but that the immediate need is for all staff to push forward and finish the year with the focus on students. He explained that ultimately their initiatives fall to his members who are on the verge of collapse and asked for a pause on all initiatives from trustees. He thanked Student Trustee Chen for recognizing his members' valuable work.

Rob Hammond noted the stress on principals and his concern that they are burning out; the system cannot afford to lose such excellent administrators and he is doubtful his members will want to replace them. He also stated that his members are reluctant to take time off out of concern for their students' wellbeing. He asked trustees to lobby with other northern trustees and apply pressure to MPPs.

Troy Simkins specifically addressed the safety of classrooms with absent staff and resignations. He would like to see trustees lobby the MOE for more educational assistant supports.

Margaret Soroye noted the toll this stress takes on members' personal home life and she sees occasionals not returning to this field and instead finding work in less stressful areas. She also asked trustees to carefully consider what ideas they bring forward to ensure it does not put added work on to members that are already stressed. Dave Bartlett concurred adding that he is aware of members calculating early retirement.

Principal Sean Ruddy spoke as NNPC president thanking the union partners for their support. He is very concerned with student achievement as the system does its best to re-organize the school day with large absenteeism.

Trustee Wesley thanked the unions for attending and their remarks. Trustee Phillips thanked the presidents for addressing violence in schools and hopes that our board places a priority on relevant training for staff. Trustee Steer advised that trustees can write a letter to the Ministry and OPSBA in support. He will raise this during the regular

meeting. Trustee Sargent thanked the presidents for attending noting how important it was for trustees to hear and thanked them for their work. Trustee Sargent noted that the conversation will continue at future meetings.

**7.0 New Business – n/a**

**8.0 Motion to Adjourn**

Motion: CW 24-04-04 C.Phillips/J.Bertram

That we do now adjourn at 7:12 pm. – CARRIED.