

Unionville High School – School Council Meeting

Date: Feb 27, 2023, 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm (online only due to weather)

Council Members: Anoosh, Felix, Wenjie, William, Neely, Mandip

UHS Staff: Mr. Patrick Belmonte, Mr. Amol Gheewala , Ms. Susie Nunes, Ms. Effie Kyriopoulos

Agenda:

1. Welcome
2. Updates from USAC - 5 min
3. School Council - 10 min
4. ADMIN Updates - 5 min
5. Subject Presentations:
 - a. Library - Ms. Hawkins - 5 min (video link to be provided)
 - b. English - Mr. Teitel - 5 min (presented by Mr. Belmonte)
6. The Gift of Learning - Stress and Our Kids – Senait Litchmore

Minutes:

Welcome

- Ms. Nunes welcomes all parents that were joining in person and online.
- Ms. Nunes reads the Land Acknowledgement

Subject Department Presentations

USAC update (Ms Faulkner, William Zhang and Isaac Yu)

- Events: Candy sending and messages for Valentine's day raised \$1000 for a local food bank
- First club meeting with club leaders – a reminder to submit forms for any reimbursement
- Upcoming events – fundraising for the earthquake in Turkey
- Spring elections will be coming up for USAC

School Council Forum Feb 16 (feedback from Mandip/Anoosh)

- Total of 4 talks. Three of them were discussed below.
- ABCs of Mental Health (see https://www2.yrdsb.ca/student-support/mental_health/abcs-mental-health). There are things that we can do:
 - Exercise and eat healthy
 - Maintain good sleep habits
 - Practice gratitude and mindfulness
 - Encourage daily face-to-face time with family and friends
- Providing Support
 - Speak to staff at your child's schools. They may be able to connect your child with:
 - School Guidance Counsellors, Social Workers or Psychologist
 - Community agencies with formal partnership agreements with the school board to serve the diverse needs of our students
 - Strategies for supporting Mental Health
 - Gratitude – gratitude practice at home
 - Colouring – other activities to express or de-stress
 - Movement – encourage children to move their bodies and get some fresh air
 - Connection – staying connected to family, friends and community
 - Parent Engagement – how parents can get engaged with school; students with involved parents are likely to have higher grades and test scores, attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behaviour and adapt well to school.
- Streaming and De-streaming

- Streaming creates long-term student groups based on perceptions of ability or separating students into different course types such as Academic, Applied, and Locally Developed
- Ontario is the only province that had streaming for English, Science, Geography, History and French in grade 9
- Grade 8 is very early to decide if one should stream - by destreaming, families have more time to understand pathways and keep options open
- Research has shown that destreaming results in better outcomes for all students – especially for marginalized communities
- For Ontario,
 - Grade 9 English, French and Geography are only offered as academic courses
 - Grade 9 Math and Science are offered as destreamed
 - By Sept 2028, grade 9 English will be destreamed
 - For YRDSB, grade 10 History and Math are academic only
 - Locally developed courses may be offered in grades 9 and 10 to help support students who have not demonstrated achievement of curriculum expectations in grades 7 & 8
- A high-level differentiation between Academic vs Applied courses
 - Academic – more University bound
 - Applied – more College/Vocationally bound

ADMIN Updates – by Mr. Belmonte

- Welcome back Suelyn Cheong as of February 28
- Course selection process (due last Friday at 4 pm) – Guidance is working with students having difficulties or having encountered errors in the next day or so to resolve
- Interim Report distribution is taking place electronically (not midterm) begins Friday, March 24; it is an early means of communication with parents to provide feedback on student progress
- Parent/Guardian-Teacher Interviews will take place on Wednesday, March 29

Library - Ms. Hawkins video

- Please go to <http://www.yrdsb.ca/schools/unionville.hs/SchoolCouncil/Pages/School-Council-Presentation.aspx>, p.15 of the Feb 27 presentation to find the link to the video.

English – Mr. Belmonte on a presentation from Mr. Teitel

- NBE3U/C/E to replace ENG3U/C/E as of this semester February 2023 (grade 11 English requirement)
- This is a federal initiative and aligns with YRDSB's Directors' Action Plan
- Goals: Build understanding of anti-oppression, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and the ongoing impact of colonialism
- Follows the Calls to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- Many boards across Ontario have already shifted or are in the process of shifting to this course
- Assessment tasks are the same as tasks we typically see in the English classroom – via essay writing, creative projects, oral presentations, and media analysis
- This course explores the themes, forms and stylistic elements of a variety of literary, informational, graphic, oral, cultural and media texts emerging from First Nations, Metis, and Inuit cultures in Canada. This fulfills the OSSD grade 11 English requirement and will be the pre-requisite for grade 12 English. While the course content will focus on Indigenous voices, it covers the same skills and strands as the Grade 11 English course:
 - Oral communication
 - Reading and Literature studies
 - Writing
 - Media studies
- The following is a list of resources recommended by CBC: <https://www.cbc.ca/books/35-books-to-read-for-national-indigenous-history-month-1.5585489>

- While only the grade 11 course code has changed, Indigenous content has become part of other English courses

Presentation from Senait Litchmore (Registered Psychotherapist) on The Gift of Learning - Stress and Our Kids

- Teens – changing and learning a lot, sometimes difficult for parents as children are becoming independent. The family system is the strongest in a teenager's life and will have a great influence. Parents are a part of the solution to the child's stress.
- Goals of workshop:
 - Why are Teens so stressed?
 - How can I help my teen?
 - Long-term strategies – establish a long-term foundation of strong connection with teens

Why are Teens so stressed?

- Common stressors
 - Peer relationships
 - A lot of stress comes from challenges from peers. Children are moving into a peer-based culture, and challenges from peers will impact them. Teens have higher contact with social media and will likely encounter more conflicts.
 - Academic expectations
 - Pressure to do well is strong due to social and economic pressures
 - Teens struggle with anxiety and perfectionism. Teens may disengage from school if they have an overwhelming sense of failure, or create a false perception of how they are doing
 - Conflict within the home
 - Can be between the parents, between the parents and other children
 - Poor communication
 - Parental relationships
 - Teens need parents. Poor teen-parent connection creates a lot of stress.
 - Attachment – Teens need unconditional love and nurturing which is essential for a sense of security. Without this, there will be a lot of stress.
 - Increase of single-parent households, or two busy working parents resulting in less time to share with each child. There is less time for face-to-face interactions, and less time to develop routines at home. Core values may be developed in a vacuum and result in stronger peer influence.
 - Physical changes
 - Physiological and psychological changes cause stress in handling emotions.
- Factors that affect susceptibility to stress
 - Personality
 - Different personalities respond differently (introvert, extravert)
 - Physiology
 - Sickness, physical, and health issues
 - Life Experiences
 - This is difficult – divorce, moving from one school to another, death, abuse, bullying, and mental health issues can all be factors
 - Parents with these challenges need to know it is not their fault and focus on helping teens to develop the skills and tools to face life issues. Children cannot be shielded completely from these. Learning how to handle stress creates resilience in children to face challenges in life

- Teenage brain development and growth
 - Synaptic pruning – unused connections in their brain are pruned away
 - Developing the prefrontal cortex – the rational part of the brain (applying logic and making choices). As this is often not well developed yet in the teenage years, it can mean making short-term decisions at the moment.
 - Amygdala – isn't fully developed in a teen. This is responsible for emotions – so teens have difficulty regulating them. Teens tend to base their decisions on emotions instead of logic. An inability to manage emotions can cause mental health issues. Parents also need to take into account that teens may be saying things based on emotions rather than logic.
 - Brain stem – control flight/fight – instinctive, reflexive (keeps us safe). When we are under stress, we go into the brain stem – Amygdala works closely with the stem – so they tend to react without the logic from the prefrontal cortex. Because of these physiological reasons, teens might underestimate the risk of danger and jump into action too quickly.

How can I help my teen?

- WE CANNOT GIVE OUR KIDS WHAT WE DON'T HAVE. It is important for parents to learn to find good strategies for dealing with emotions and stress to help teens.
 - Help them to develop practices (like writing a journal) to handle stress, to express emotions in other forms.
 - Talking through decisions – asking questions to support them in making logical decisions, to understand risk and consequences.
 - A good parent is an engaged parent – using tools/knowledge available to us. We need to extend compassion/grace to ourselves so we can do so to our children.
- Recognize emotional signs of stress
 - Anxiety (it serves a purpose – it keeps us safe - a stress response) it can cause overreaction. Inability to relax, avoidance, nail-biting, nightmares, fear of falling asleep, stomachache, headache with no underlying cause, fear of being humiliated, embarrassed
 - Withdrawn – from normal activities (a symptom of depression), from social groups
 - Overwhelmed – could be based on wrong perceptions.
 - Anger – issue with regulating emotion. Bad temper tantrums, picking fights, destructive (self-destructive) behaviour – alcohol, overeating, intentionally harming themselves. This is different from other signs as anger can produce adrenalin arousal – can feel good – a sense of power. But this damages relationships and health.
Parents – do not take it personally, separate and keep yourself safe. Know that they need help to manage their emotions. External support may be required in case of anger if you feel unsafe.
 - Low self-esteem – disappointment/failure can erode self-esteem. Some signs are early sexual activity, vaping, and drinking – addiction as a coping mechanism. Other behaviours include excessive bragging (not obvious but can be a mask for poor self-esteem), negative self-talk, and constant apologizing. The underlying fear of unworthiness.
Be aware of these and provide help.
 - Especially if these symptoms are prolonged.
 - Adults recognizing these and providing support can build strong connections.
- Recognize new Stressors
 - Social Media is a tool for connection, but it can be misused, overused and replace developmentally necessary activities (such as face-to-face with friends, doing work, exercising, and getting outside).
 - Important to be aware of the excessive use

- Excessive screen time can shift our brains into flight/fight mode – we are always in a hyper-aroused state with too much screen time. It creates health issues.
- Do recognize that there are benefits of social media (we cannot completely demonize it – it will disconnect us from kids)
 - Stay connected to friends
 - Entertainment
 - Meet new people with shared interests (social justice, mobilizing, for cause)
 - Share creativity with others
 - Exploring and expressing themselves (learning other cultures)
- Also the risks
 - Exposure to harmful or inappropriate content, dangerous people
 - Cyberbullying
 - Poor social/communication skills
 - Oversharing personal information
 - Increased feelings of depression, anxiety, poor body image and loneliness
 - Interference with sleep, exercise, homework or family activities.
- Age 11-13 – most likely to experience the harmful side of social media.
- Solutions for social media-related issues
 - Limit your personal phone use (so it is not a barrier between parents and children)
 - Nurture their interests (parents showing interest in various things are important – nurture connections)
 - Strengthen their in-person relationships (difficult for teenagers – find community groups, cultural, and religious groups etc, and guide the child to find friends aligned with your family values).
 - Create phone limits for the entire family
 - Nurture your relationship with your teen (learn how to do things with them – bedtime routines, hanging out, driving them, game night, etc.
 - Teach them tips to be safe while using Social Media (e.g. limiting wifi in the home)
- Information Overload
 - Children have access to a lot of information (often negative). Adults might be better able to filter out what's more credible than teens
 - Teens (especially girls) can often feel overwhelmed.
 - Teach teens to think and challenge what they read in a safe way.
- Parenting Styles
 - Parents are overwhelmed with information on how to parent, leaving parents anxious and overwhelmed
 - Parents are over-parenting and teens are doing less, therefore not developing the necessary skills to cope with life's challenges (not as many summer jobs, driving around). We need to help kids to develop life skills.
- Recognize how we contribute to our child's stress
 - Shame - People who experience shame will use shame to fight shame (for example, via anger)
 - Instead of Do

▪ Punishment	Learn to separate problems from teens
▪ Humiliation	Show kindness (apply a generous interpretation)
▪ Making assumptions	Show curiosity, ask open-ended questions
▪ Criticism	Gentle Start-Up (I feel I need)

- Emotional Distance Be emotionally close
- Negative labels Have a growth mindset (grow good habits)
- Rigidity flexibility (adjust expectations)
- Counter shame – use a generous interpretation

Long term

- Protective Factors
 - Connection
 - Connection over correction – we need to connect before we correct. Teens who do not feel accepted do not accept themselves, they will try to get it from someone else. They need to feel like they belong to feel safe. It's a safety mechanism. Parents should stay close to teenagers even though they may not know they need it to provide a safety net.
 - Attachment
 - The relationship with your teen is the most important relationship they will ever have
 - Nurture strong relationships around them
 - Your child needs your unconditional support, love and nurturing care
 - Body Care
 - Sleep – provide good practice to prep for sleep
 - Play
 - Nutrition
 - Deep breathing
 - Physical activity
 - Parenting Style
 - You cannot give your child what you don't have
 - Notice and validate emotions, don't rescue
 - Build their self-esteem
 - Praise who they are, not what they do
 - Repair, repair, repair
 - Respect

Book Recommendations

- How to Talk so Teens will Listen and Listen so Teens Talk
- The Teenage Brain: a neuroscientist's survival guide to raising adolescents and young adults
- Brainstorm: the power and purpose of the teenage brain
- The Gifts of Imperfect Parenting: raising children with courage, compassion & connection
- The Conscious Parent: transforming ourselves, empowering our children
- Good Inside: a practical guide to becoming the parent you want to be