

CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CITY OF NIAGARA FALLS
DISTRICT PARENT COMMITTEE

Minutes

Wednesday, March 26, 2025, at 5:30 P.M.

First Floor Conference Room – Administration Building

Present: Jacqueline Blaber, Makeesha Booker, Tammy Capatosto, Dasha Colvin, Rory Diamond, Angela Douglas, Tiffany Garcia, Heather Johnson, Stephanie Lee-Martin, Jolene Nearhood, Lauren Piaskowski, Cindy Smith, Keshia Vincent, Nick Vilardo, Stan Wojton and Wendy Tedesco.

Schools Represented: Abate, Bloneva Bond, Cataract, GJ Mann, Hyde Park, Gaskill Prep, LaSalle Prep, and NFHS

Schools Missed: 79th Street, Kalfas and Maple

Contact Phone Number: Stan Wojton, Central Office Ph: 286-4189 Email: swojton@nfschools.net

Procedural Matters

1. All concerns should be taken to your building principal or School Quality Council before being brought up at the District Parent Committee meeting.
2. The information discussed at the DPC meeting is to be relayed back to your school parent group.
3. At least one representative from each school should attend each meeting. If one representative cannot attend a certain meeting, they should notify their alternate representative.
4. The meeting agendas and minutes can be found at www.nfschools.net under the “Parent & Guardian” tab, “District Parent Committee” heading.

District Update

Mr. Wojton took a moment to acknowledge staff, student and families who are going through a challenging time at NFHS, Kalfas and GJ Mann. The District is providing as much support to these families as possible. This weekend at Kalfas Dr. Falzone from Niagara University will be hosting the adult ENL program. NFHS is having a career fair for students from 10 AM to 1 PM this Saturday, March 29. More information will be forthcoming regarding the 25th Anniversary celebration for NFHS. The NFHS Proscenium Players will present “Godspell” on March 27, 28 and 19. This Thursday is a PD day for teachers (no students in session). Secure vestibules will be complete by end of summer. Student athletes will now be able to go to their primary doctor for a sports physical. Much more information on that will be forthcoming. Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration will take place on April 8 at Bloneva Bond. A number of awards of distinction will be given out at this celebration. There will be a keynote speaker who will also speak to students regarding her work at GPS and LPS, as well as the students at NFHS in the Africa American Studies class.

Welcome & Introductions

Mrs. Johnson welcomed everyone to the meeting and then introduced the first presenter.

2025-26 School Budget

Mrs. Jacklin is the Budget Manager for the District. Rebecca Holody is the District’s School Business Administrator. Because they are presenting on the budget prior to the public hearing taking place, their presentation format will be a little different than in past years. The final budget amount has not yet been finalized. At the Board of Education meeting on April 10, the budget amount will be recommended for approval. Mrs. Jacklin and Mrs. Holody have preliminary numbers to share, but please keep in mind that there may be some changes made between now and April 10. The budget process begins in November. In December, District staff begin to hold internal budget meetings

which are led by Mr. Laurrie. The District's goals are to maintain existing programming and staffing and not to increase the tax levy. In January 2025, the Governor releases the State's budget proposal, which gives the District a basis of information to work from. Starting in January, Mrs. Holody and Mrs. Jacklin present information on the budget at Board of Education meetings. Each week, they fine-tune the budget up until April 10 when the final recommendation is given to the BOE for their approval. As of today, the budget amount is at \$202,690,136, which is an increase of almost \$11.7 M over last year. However, there is still no increase to tax levy, which has not changed since 2014. The District is very heavily reliant on NYS Aid. In the last few years, the Governor has fully funded Foundation Aid, which is very good for school districts. In order to close the budget gap for 2025-26, the District will have to use fund balance and reserves. Mrs. Jacklin provided information on the District's revenue sources

Mrs. Holody provided information on the District's expenses. Because the District is a service provider to the students, employee salaries/wages/benefits are the biggest expense. For 2025-26, the District anticipates spending just over \$82 Million on salaries and \$5 Million on benefits. Debt service is at \$18.5 Million. Transportation costs are based on contracted rates through First Student (out-of-district) and NF Coach lines (in-district). These rates are driven by the State's CPI (consumer price index). The District spend about \$2 Million for utilities. Next year, these costs will increase due to the new air conditioning at both prep schools. Tuition rates for out-of-district special education students and students who attend charter schools will increase this year. BOCES services (mostly technology related) are at about \$15 Million. However, the District generates aid for a majority of the BOCES services. Equipment purchases, liability insurance, supplies, etc. makes up miscellaneous expenses. Overall, the District anticipates spending over \$202 Million. As Mr. Laurrie says, our District students need every staff member and program we have to support them. The Board of Education and the Superintendent have worked hard to give students what they need. Our school buildings are in good condition, especially compared to other districts. The District is able to keep the schools in good shape because of its 5-year cycle for capital projects.

On May 20, the only thing City residents will be voting on is the 2025-26 school budget dollar amount set by the District. The District cannot spend a dime more than voters approve. A lot can happen in next two weeks, so the proposed budget number may change. At the public hearing in May, the actual proposed budget amount will be provided, along with supporting information. Overall, Mrs. Holody feels the proposed budget is a good one. It keeps all existing programs and staff in place, with use of some reserves and fund balance. There will be no impact to tax payers.

As a result of the COVID pandemic, the District received APR funds in the amount of \$30 Million. At that time, the District hired additional staff. Fortunately, the District will be able to keep those employees even though the funding is now over. Student enrollment has stayed about the same over the past couple of years. However, costs for services required to support students have increased. The district will also continue to run the same summer programming as last year.

Mr. Wojton noted that the District's financial team has put in a lot of effort into the budget and has done an amazing job.

Girl Scouts

Ms. Alessandra Santarosa, who is a representative of the local Girl Scouts of WNY, spoke about the benefits of belonging to the Girls Scouts and how it helps in personal development. Ms. Santarosa grew up in the Niagara Falls area and was a Girl Scout herself. Girl Scouts first formed in 1912 in Atlanta, GA. The first girl scout charter was signed in Niagara Falls in 1916. Over the last few years, enrollment has been down. Many girls are involved in other activities such as sports. The Girl Scouts have 4 pillars: STEM, Entrepreneurship, Outdoor Skills, and Life Skills. Many girls get to experience being outside and learn how to navigate and go hiking. They are also introduced to nature. Life skills covers a lot of different areas such as social skills, making new friends, sharing, becoming a good citizen. Girls also had an opportunity to visit places like UB School of Medicine and dentist's offices under the STEM pillar.

Under the entrepreneurship pillar, they learn about business, financial literacy and communication skills by selling cookies. Belonging to Girl Scouts also builds confidence.

There are two adult co-leaders for each Girl Scout group. Groups meet periodically and are all-girl led. In order to determine what types of activities the girls will participate in, group leaders find out what the girls' interests are and then go from there. Girl Scouts is constantly updating and expanding their programming. Girls in Grades K and 1 can enroll in Daisies. Girls in Grades 2 and 3 can join Brownies. If an adult reaches out who is interested in starting a new group, Girl Scouts will send them all the information and materials they need to run meetings. The biggest struggle is finding parents who can lead troops. Parents are already busy with a lot of different activities (dance, soccer, etc.). Only have a few troops in the area that will still take on new members. There are two troops in Niagara Falls currently. They are always looking for volunteers. Any help is appreciated, even if it is just an hour a month. Volunteers go through a background check and receive training.

Girl Scouts provides girls with an opportunity to explore and learn outside the classroom to make the world a better place. Girls can also join Boys Scout if they wish. As girls get older, they sometimes lose interest in belonging to the Girl Scouts, but they are able to continue all the way through Grade 12. Girls can sign up for Girl Scouts on-line through the Girl Scouts website. They offer an extended membership starting April 1.

AOBs

Mr. Wojton share some additional dates of upcoming events:

- On April 5, the Power Authority will have an Extravaganza which is open to the public.
- There will be a Walk the Falls event in conjunction with the Underground Railroad Museum.
- On April 30, a Walk to Stop Child Abuse will be held at Hyde Park.
- A meat raffle will be held at NFHS on April 5, doors open at 5 PM. There will also be a basket auction and vendors.
- The next SEPTA meeting is Monday, May 19 at the NFCSD Administration Building in the first floor conference room.
- The Niagara Community Information Group is hosting a teen hall listening session regarding the Governor's cell phone mandate. The listening session will give kids a chance to engage in civics, as well as have their point-of-view heard.
- On April 3 at Bloneva Bond, there will be a family engagement night starting at 3:30 PM which is open to the community. There will be Chiavetta's chicken dinners for sale, as well as a basket auction and Scholastic bookfair.
- On April 8 prior to the MLK celebration, there will be a student spelling bee at Bloneva Bond. Next year, they are opening the spelling bee up to other District schools.

The NFHS indoor track and field team went to nationals in Virginia Beach recently. They competed against student athletes from across the country.

****No April Meeting****

Next Meeting: Wednesday, May 28, 2025 in First Floor Conference Room