

**Vanier Catholic Secondary School Council**  
**Wednesday, March 27, 2013**  
**VCSS Small Gymnasium**  
**7:30 to 10:00pm**

**Minutes**

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**Attendance**

**Members:**

Paul Flaherty  
Dianne Tait  
John Berg  
James Mooney  
Terry Prenolso

**Secretary/Treasurer:**

Yolande Cherepak

**Department of Education:**

Val Royle – Deputy Minister  
Lori Choquette – School Liaison

**Facilitator:**

Barrett Horne

**Regrets:**

Mike Woods – Superintendent

**\*The format of the meeting was changed to a Public Forum due to the nature of the issues needing to be addressed, as well as the high number of guests expected to attend (150)**

**Adoption of Agenda**

Agenda items were deferred to next month's meeting, however Guest Presenters were given allotted time to speak (15 min.) as per Council's Guest Presenter guidelines

**Opening Prayer and Comments – Paul Flaherty**

Paul Flaherty welcomed everyone, opened the meeting with a prayer, and introduced the council members. He defined the purpose of the meeting to be for the Council to listen to the speakers, ask clarifying questions and seek input for future actions. The intent is not to resolve issues at the meeting tonight.

## Opening Comments – Val Royle

Val Royle gave an update on the issues which have been under discussion.

1. Locker incident and its review – School administration followed a process whereby it was determined that Property Management would have to take care of the repair due to the extent of the damage of this locker. Property Management decided that this locker, as well as others, would need to be repaired and upgraded and this was completed within two weeks. From the perspective of Yukon Education, the school has a mandate for care of its students. Therefore, in the future, in cases such as this and when Property Management cannot, for whatever reason, respond in a timely manner, administration should find a different means of fixing the problem which would be to contact the Yukon Education facilities staff. Yukon Education has changed the process for these kinds of repairs as a result of this incident.
2. Same-sex Policy – Yukon Education, Episcopal Corporation, and VCSS Council are working together to develop a practical, student-centered implementation guide for Yukon Education’s policy on sexual orientation and gender identity at VCSS. The working group agrees that a safe, secure, and respectful environment for every student is critical. The first draft of this policy is being reviewed by Yukon Education and the Episcopal Corporation. The document includes:
  - a. Zero tolerance for discrimination of any kind with supporting grade-level assemblies and information campaigns;
  - b. Harassment and discrimination of students with same-sex orientation is not to be tolerated anywhere on school property;
  - c. Development of a student group or groups that address issues of equity, diversity, and anti-bullying; and
  - d. Absence of any language that could potentially negatively impact a student.

After the first level of review, CEAY will review the draft document. There will be opportunity for staff and student input at the school, VCSS Council will host a public meeting at the end of April to receive public input. Policy implementation is planned for May. The zero tolerance aspects are in effect immediately.

3. Religious Education in Catholic Schools – The roles of different stakeholders (the Bishop, the Minister, School Council, CEAY, School Administration, the Superintendent, and Yukon Education) need to be clarified to avoid confusion and ensure that stakeholders that need to approve a policy are involved at the right time. An MOU will be completed before the 2013-14 School Year. The Episcopal Corporation, Yukon Education, and the school community will also develop a clear Communication Protocol to support the roles and responsibilities described above.
4. Hiring Policy – The Bishop has agreed that the Hiring Policy in the CEAY Strategic plan will be reviewed for the 2013-14 School Year in the coming weeks since hiring begins in the next three or four weeks. A more comprehensive review will happen over the coming months for the 2014-15 School Year and beyond. The working group will be looking at expectations of teachers in the Catholic school and possible flexibility in the hiring policy.

All the above describes the commitment Yukon Education has made with some short-term and long-term deadlines. They want to model a respectful, solution-focused attitude and behaviours which show that they value the Catholic schools, its students and the Catholic education community.

## **Meeting Protocol**

Paul outlined how the meeting will proceed: the regular agenda will be set aside for this meeting, Guest Presenters already on the agenda will still have their 15 minutes to talk as outlined in School Council's guidelines, then there will be an open forum for people to give comments (5 min each). A facilitator will be assisting and the meeting will end at 10:00pm.

## **Rules**

Facilitator, Barrett Horne, gave some opening comments and defined the rules to be followed by the speakers and attending public:

1. Guest presenters will have 15 min. All other speakers will have 5 minutes.
2. A timer will be used to time the speakers, a red card will be raised when there is one minute left, and a timer will ring at 5 min.
3. It is not appropriate to speak about individuals, and identify staff or students by name or position. This is council policy.
4. There will be no decision-making tonight. This is an opportunity to hear and listen to each other.
5. Speakers are to state their names and connection with the school.
6. Speakers can only speak once.
7. There are to be no interruptions of speakers.
8. Speak from your own perspective, not on behalf of others.
9. Listen with your hearts and minds.
10. No personal attacks.

## **Guest Presenters (15 min)**

1. Leah White – Ms. White is the mother of the student who had her locker vandalized. She is looking for a restorative justice process on behalf of her daughter and would like students and teachers to take ownership of what happened. She had hoped for an open discussion. She relayed the deep negative effect the incident has had on her daughter and how her daughter is simply looking for an apology. Ms. White is wondering why Council did not respond to her complaint which she issued in October and also to a letter which she sent in January. This incident has negatively affected the students and the school.

Desired outcome: Implementation of a restorative justice process and an apology for her daughter.

2. Rick Griffiths – Mr. Griffiths is a former teacher at Vanier and spoke on behalf of a group of concerned parishioners (Eleanor O'Donovan, Katie Shewfelt and Rosemary Burns). He described each person's previous work at Vanier and their interpretation of the word 'catholic' which allowed for ecumenical openness and a successful school community.

He described their group's support of Yukon Education's directives on safe and caring schools, as well as the steps Yukon Ed is taking to involve the broader school community.

Mr. Griffiths referenced the Circle of Caring documents available on the CEAY website. Eleanor O'Donovan and Katie Shewfelt each in turn read the Mission Statement and Values of the Catholic Schools of Whitehorse.

Mr. Griffiths talked about concern re: low morale at the school, teachers' requests for transfers and declining student population, lowered interest from parents at the Catholic feeder elementary schools, and potential loss in funding, staffing and programming.

Mr. Griffiths offered two proposals: i) That the VCSS Council recognize the role of the CEAY as the governing body which will guide the implementation of the Circle of Caring strategic plan, support the plan's mandate, and make their position known to the Episcopal Corporation; and ii) That Yukon Education employ an experienced mediator to explore commonalities and resolve outstanding issues between teachers and school administration.

3. Cynthia Matichak – Ms. Matichak explained her reasons for writing her letter to the newspapers. She is concerned with how Vanier is heading, particularly in regards to changes in administration, loss of teachers and its reverting to a more conservative environment.

She asked why the name of the document was changed on the website after she went to a Council meeting in November, and whose decision it was to change it. Dianne Tait addressed the question by saying that the guidance document was prepared in September and that it has always had the same name, that it appears the link was changed from Same-sex attraction to the name of document but did not know why and whose decision it was. Ms. Matichak said that this caused confusion when people were looking for the document on the school website. James Mooney clarified that the document's sub-title refers to 'Same-sex guidelines'.

Ms. Matichak asked why the current religion curriculum is not on the website and why there is a need for a change in the curriculum. Ms. Royle addressed the question by saying that there is presently a new religion curriculum being developed by the Canadian Bishops, but was unsure when it would be available. Ms. Royle said that Yukon Education is presently working in conjunction with the Bishop in reviewing the new religious education curriculum. She said that the curriculum is publicly available and Paul Flaherty indicated that the curriculum would be put on the school website.

Ms. Matichak asked how School Council and the administration are going to address reduced enrolment (40 students) and staff transferring out of the schools (10 in June 2012). Paul Flaherty replied that the hiring policy will be reviewed in the next three to four weeks and that Yukon Education will be looking at mediation to help the school move forward. Ms. Royle summarized the Yukon Education's short and long-term plans for the hiring policy, as well as mediation.

Ms. Matichak asked if Council members have children in Vanier and how long they have been on Council. John and Terry have children at Vanier, and Dianne, James and Paul do not. John, Terry and James are in their first term as Council members, Dianne has over 20 years on councils, and Paul 10 years.

#### **Public Forum (5 min.)**

4. Rick Tone – Mr. Tone stated that he also wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper because he was concerned about the negative publicity about Vanier. He declared himself as a non-Catholic and former parent who is concerned about schools and education. He described his child's negative experience at another high school and challenged other speakers to give positive comments about Vanier before they speak.

5. Elliott Berg - Mr. Berg is a Grade 12 student at Vanier and asked the rhetorical question: “How many Vanier students are church-attending Catholics?”. His question was noted and could not be answered at the time.
6. Jorgen Ponsioen – Mr. Ponsioen is a parent of two former and two current Vanier students. He feels the policy is overshadowing the seriousness of the hate-crime and he is looking to see how the locker incident will be dealt with apart from repairing the locker.
7. Margaret Kuiack – Ms. Kuiack is a parent of a Vanier student and two former students, and declared herself a practicing Catholic. She is concerned about the issues of: low morale at the school; how some parents feel like School Council is not listening; the loss of teachers, two administrators and a priest at the school; declining enrolment and how that will affect programs; accountability of administration at school and department level; the student who was involved in the locker incident; leadership; nepotism; hiring practices; interpretation of the Catholic schools’ mission statement. She feels that the issues need to be addressed at a human level.
8. Maura Sullivan - Ms. Sullivan is a teacher at Vanier and asked how we [the staff] could build morale at the school, and how hurt and mistrust can be addressed. She feels that concerns brought to Council by staff last year were not dealt with, and that staff are meeting the needs of the students, but not of the school. She would like the staff to come together with the help of a mediator.
9. Brian Blindheim - Mr. Blindheim is a parent of a Vanier student. He described his experience as a former student at Christ the King [Junior High] and he is wondering why the same situation is happening now at Vanier as it did when he was a student.
10. Shannon Poelman – Ms. Poelman is a parent of a student at Vanier, as well as a former student of the Yukon Catholic school system. She feels that the school is not the school she had hoped for her child. She says that her daughter is happy here with the teachers, and does not want the teachers to leave. Ms. Poleman would like to see changes and action so teachers will stay and the school can move forward.
11. Marika Isaac - Ms. Isaac is a taxpayer and declared herself a lesbian. She has a concern about the lack of action and is here to support gay students, as well as teachers who support the gay students.
12. Rebecca Gates - Ms. Gates is a Grade 12 Vanier student and says students are generally happy. She talked about the response of other schools to derogatory comments on lockers, and how the negative publicity about Vanier is causing the declining enrolment. She that when they have new staff and teachers, the students grow to accept them, and that change happens.
13. Alex Robinson - Mr. Robinson is a parent of two Vanier students and has friends on staff. He is frustrated because he feels he has been lied to and given false information, and has not received any response from school authorities. He says the teachers are great and this forum would not have happened if parents had been listened to by School Council.
14. Julie Tone - Ms. Tone is a community member and declared herself a Christian. She expressed deep empathy for the student and parent, and said she is sorry that they had to experience that locker incident since that it is inappropriate behaviour in school and in the workplace.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ - Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ is the grandmother of a Vanier student. She is thankful for the Catholic school system so that her daughters and granddaughter can have the same [Christian]

upbringing as she did. She made a reference to how taxpayer money is spent, said we have to love, forgive, and keep going on. She wants the Catholic schools to stay open because they have nowhere else to go.

16. Pat Ross – Mr. Ross is a parent of a Vanier student. He described his Catholic school experience and why he decided to send his daughter to Vanier. What he values from the Catholic school is that his daughter is getting a strong sense of moral code, is being exposed to other religions, and will have the grounds to take on the world after high school. He's happy with the school, thanked teachers and Council, and hopes Council will determine what the moral offense is and help the teachers.
17. Reverend Martin Carole – Reverend Carole was raised as a Catholic and is now Anglican. He is a grandparent of a Christ the King student and parent of former Christ the King [Junior High] students. He talked about how the [Catholic] school is teaching kids a world view and how to get involved unlike other schools. He wants his kids to come to a system that recognizes that the world is a global place and gets the students involved in such issues as the soup kitchen and foodbank.
18. Judy Douglas – Ms. Douglas is a concerned citizen and a Christian. She talked about her Christian beliefs, the Lord's Word, and God's view of gay people, and read from scripture.
19. Julie Stinson – Ms. Stinson is a parent of two children at Vanier. She stated that she is not a Catholic but has felt welcome. She said that one of her children has decided to transfer to another school. She expressed her concern about teachers and students leaving, hopes things go back to the way they were, and that it stays a good community Catholic school.
20. Alec Coda - Mr. Coda is a Grade 12 Vanier student. He made two points about improving the environment at the school: 1) that he respects that someone may have views but that maybe if the policy hadn't been posted, the word wouldn't have been written on the locker; and 2) that there are bigger problems at the school with higher negative impacts, such as bullying and racism.
21. Tjitske Van der Eide– Ms. Van der Eide is a parent of two Vanier students and said that she is married to Council Member Berg. She had enrolled her kids at Catholic schools because they had a good reputation and they were inclusive. She relayed her experience living in other communities, her past school experience, and her experience with Holy Communion. She talked about how she was given a broad view of the world through a variety of teachers including gay teachers, and how she wants to return to that at Vanier.
22. Sabine Anderson - Ms. Anderson is a Grade 8 Vanier student. She said there are probably policies about sexism and racism too and we will get past it.
23. Marie Leung - Ms. Leung is a parent of two Vanier students and was baptized Catholic. She described her negative Catholic elementary school experience, her initial positive impressions of Vanier, her children's choice to go to this school and how it has been a positive experience, including the religion class. She said that religion helps whether you are a Catholic or not. She also said that if teachers leave, her children will probably look at following those teachers.
24. Laurie Little - Ms. Little is a parent of students at another Whitehorse high school, and is Christian. She said that the issue is not the school policy but more about what is being taught at home. She feels hatred has been bred towards Catholic and Christians in the community, but that children should be taught to be respectful to all people in all situations. She described her children's

experience at the other school and about the values being communicated related to teenage sex, pregnancy, and Christian beliefs. She hopes that Vanier will hold on to some of its beliefs regarding life and intimacy. She said that Vanier allows there to be a choice for different people's beliefs and that if you don't agree, you can choose a different school, also paid by taxpayers.

25. Bill Willoughby – Mr. Willoughby is a Vanier teacher. He stated that the problems at Vanier are because of a lack of relationship building and communication problems between the Bishop, School Council, teachers and administration. He recognizes the need for all to work more closely together and for a mediator to help communication between teachers and administration. He felt that this is a positive experience and that we can get to the bottom of the problems to serve the students better.
  26. Brian Kitchen – Mr. Kitchen is a parent of a Vanier student and graduate of Vanier, is married to Ms. Kuiack, and declared himself a practicing Protestant. He is interested in the hiring policy: what sort of process the Dept of Ed sees in the short term for review of the policy and what input we [parents] will have. The mediator replied that Ms. Royle would answer the question at the end of the evening.
  27. Daryl Sheppard – Mr. Shepard is the Religious Ed Coordinator – He talked about the policy and how criticism is about Catholic teaching and doctrine, not as much about the implementation and how teachers are ministering to the students. He stated that building morale of the school is up to the staff, not just administration, and shouldn't fall on one or two people. He talked about how Catholic Education is being limited to the definition of 'ecumenism' – celebrating our commonalities and respecting our differences - but is hearing instead that we're not allowed to have differences. He said that in the spirit of ecumenism, there needs to be dialogue.
  28. Stevie Godfrey - Mr. Godfrey is a public citizen and stated that he loves the Lord and this school. He has many years of experience with pre-school children and expressed appreciation for the students and the school. He feels that the teachers are doing an incredible job. He gave Council the analogy of taking the first step, and everything will follow, and could lead to better morale a little at a time.
- Ms. Royle addressed the Hiring Policy question at this time: For hiring for the 2013-14 SY (April 15<sup>th</sup>), the CEAY- comprised of School Council members, the Bishop and school administrators - will look at the policy in the short-term for what can happen for the upcoming school year. For the longer term, more time is needed to review the policy and make any changes.
29. Nicola Pritchett – Ms. Pritchett is a parent of a student at Vanier and one child entering the school in the future. She stated that having everyone here tonight and sharing their wisdom shows that the system is working and that it's good that all can share in a respectful way. She talked about how it takes each of us to make a difference for all of us and our children and future children.
  30. Shae-lynn Boyko – Ms. Boyko is a Grade 12 student at Vanier. She has always had support from teachers and students. She stated that hearing about the incident bothered her and that maybe it wasn't handled well. However, all the students learned from it, things will get better and now the students know how to handle such an incident if it happens again. She thanked the teachers and said Vanier is a great school.
  31. Jane Londero – Ms. Londero is a long-time teacher at Vanier and declared that she is not a Catholic. She talked about how she was hired at the school, said that many teachers love this school, and that Yukon Education needs to adjust the hiring policy because it is causing division amongst the staff.

She said that many teachers are making the symbolic gesture of transferring because they are not feeling as welcome as before. She said that students have a chance to be exposed to religions and other experiences through the curriculum. She asked that [Yukon Education] not hire someone just because they are Catholic but rather there should be a balance of teachers so that people are exposed to many views.

32. Elliott Berg- Grade 12 Vanier Student - [Mr. Berg was allowed to speak twice since his first comment was very short.] He provided some stats that may have been missed: 10 teachers applied for transfers last year, and 10 more have applied for transfer this year; enrolment has decreased 13%. He has concerns with the controversy over the same sex policy, the hiring policy, 48-hour hiring, and new teachers having more of a Catholic background. He feels the school is shifting towards Catholicism and there hasn't been this sort of controversy in the past. He is concerned for the teachers and is seeing that the school is becoming more Catholic and that needs to be slowed down. He says that staff and students should have more say in decisions.
33. Mia Richard – Ms. Richard is a religion teacher and guidance councillor at Vanier. She says that the Vanier staff are wonderful people and all have good intentions. She doesn't want people to think she was hired just because she is Catholic, but rather because of her credentials, otherwise that is also discrimination. She feels that having a mediator is a good idea and that staff need to communicate better and get to know each other and are all there for the needs of the children.
34. Julie Tone – Ms. Tone spoke a few more words about her Christian beliefs.

Paul thanked everyone for coming and sharing their thoughts. He stated that there are a number of processes in place and opportunities to engage with people, specifically around the end of April. He encouraged people to come out and give input.

James Mooney thanked everyone, invited people to attend the Council meetings, and mentioned that Council is still looking for parents to participate in the School Growth Plan.