

# Westmount School Council Meeting - March 2023

**Date:** March 8, 2023

**Location:** Video Conference

**Time:** 7:00 PM

---

Chair: Roti Akinsanmi

## **Council**

Vice-Chair: Kim Anthony

Treasurer: Navdeep Kailey

Secretary: Thomas Chan

Communications Director: Kathy Good

Fundraising Director: Laura Teterenko

Parent Engagement Director: Ashley Wilford-Matthews

Special Events Director: Ameet Kooner

Director-at-Large: Terri May

Director-at-Large: Melissa Wolsey

## **Administration**

Superintendent: Dr. Myra C. Hood

Principal Elementary Campus: Hal Curties

Principal Mid-High Campus: Graeme Finlay

Student Council Representative: Laiba Nasir (VP Student Council)

Note: Video recording of this meeting is also available online ([link](#))

## **1. Opening Remarks, Approval of the Agenda**

The February 8<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes have not been complete so we will be removing the approval of the minutes from our agenda. Simmon Corrin the Board Representative and Community Liaison will also be providing an update, which will be added to the agenda.

Kim Anthony motioned to approve the agenda, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ameet Kooner. Agenda approved.

Land Acknowledgement (Melissa Wolsey) - Wanted to take this time to honor and recognize the indigenous people and acknowledge that we live on the traditional Treaty of Territory Seven in Southern Alberta and the Metis Nation of Alberta Region Three. I also want to acknowledge the ongoing struggles that indigenous people are still facing, and that without concrete action land acknowledgements on their own are not enough to address these issues. Thank you.

Recognition of International Women's Day (Roti Akinsanmi) - It's a day we celebrate and honor the women in our lives.

Traffic at Both Campuses (Roti Akinsanmi) - We are quite concerned as parents on school council. There have been incidents that are troubling regarding traffic. When we get to the principal's updates, these are one of the areas we want to touch on.

## **2. Student Council Report**

- A lot of work has been done on the Spring Dances coming up. There will be two dances, one for the mid school during the day and a formal for the highschool after school.
- We have a talent show coming up. A lot of students are engaged in that event. In the talent show it's kind of like a lip sync or what are you talented in? Students are singing, they're doing lip syncs, they're dancing, all the good stuff.
- The diversity council, which is not fully student run, is also doing work on a multicultural day. We do have a multicultural day coming up, where we will be doing food sales.

### 3. Principals' Report

[EC Principal's Report](#)

[Mid-High Principal's Report](#)

#### a. Elementary Campus Update - Hal Curties

- **Elementary Campus** - This month is Responsibility month and teachers will include a lesson or two each week during March on Responsibility. We will be going into classes to read books with the students on the subject of responsibility. I would like to invite parents to ask their kids what they're learning about responsibility and see if you can create some opportunities in your day-to-day life to point things out that are responsible. It means a lot if what we're doing at school also happens at home.
- **Ramadan** - Happy Ramadan to all our Muslim community members.
- **Healthy Hunger Lunch** - Big thank you to Laura Teterenko for setting up the Healthy Hunger Lunch. Our students are really excited about it.
- **Professional Development** - We have some PD days coming up on March 24<sup>th</sup>. The Center for Sexuality is coming out to talk to our teachers about sexual health with kids from Kindergarten to Grade Four. That is not something that anybody studies in university and it would be healthy for us to have a good sense of how to support that.
- **Traffic** - After school today, a car hit one of our buses. Just an example of how quickly and easily that can happen. Nobody was injured, but it just speaks to the fact that there's so much potential for disaster. I'm going to be working with the Calgary Police Service to come up with a way that Westmount community members and Parkdale residents who are seeing things that are either inconsiderate, illegal or unsafe, can just report them directly to the police service. We are also going to talk to our ward alderman and we're going to talk to the city about the possibility of getting a crosswalk put in on 5<sup>th</sup> avenue where a lot of people are crossing in an extremely dangerous way. I think that 98% of our parents are extremely responsible and thoughtful and we are dealing with a couple of parents who don't do that. Sorry to have to talk about traffic again.

#### b. Mid-High Campus Update - Graeme Finlay

- **Athletics** - Both our junior team basketball seasons have wrapped up. Our junior girls won their conference and will have a banner to hang up in our gym. Our

junior boys finished fourth and lost one of the most exciting basketball games where it came down to free throws with zero time left. Our girls curling team went up to St. Albert for Provincials. The team was new to curling but had an absolutely fantastic time and loved the experience. Badminton and rugby will be starting up now that basketball's finishing up.

- **Seniors Night** - We just had our Seniors Night on Monday. It's a great tradition at Westmount. Our last home game of the season, we always call Seniors Night and we honor all our graduating athletes because it's their last home game as a member of Westmount. We always do that as part of athletics. We had a big turnout and our stage was full.
- **Band** - Our bands have been super busy with our concerts. Every single band, our Grade 6 band, our Grade 7 & 8 band, our Senior Concert band, our Symphonic band, our Jazz band, have all been participating. They all get the experience of performing at a concert in a concert hall. Our Jazz band was actually at the Ironwood Stage and Grill to perform. Kudos to our music department there, it has been fantastic.
- **Career Fair** - Career fair had close to 30 different experts in their field come and share their time with our students. We had everything from physiotherapists to writers to playwrights to genetic lab manager to doctors, to lawyers. A huge thank you to all the volunteers and we really appreciate the time. Our kids absolutely loved it and I'm hoping it's to start of an annual tradition.
- **Course Selection** - We've met with every class from Grade 6 through to Grade 11. Just a reminder that tomorrow we have a parent information night about course selection. There's a zoom link in the communications. We'll go over everything that we tell all the students. Also, want to highlight that on our website. If you go under student life/course selection for every grade, there's basically a handbook that goes through everything. There's a course planning tool, so please check that on the website. Course selection goes on until Spring Break.
- **Parent Teacher Interviews** - Will be right before Spring Break. In-person interviews will be on a Thursday and then Friday we be online. There will be communication coming out about parent-teacher interviews.
- **Friendology** - Coming out of Covid, one of the things that's hit us was the fact that there was a delay in social skills with some students. Our students are not used to being sort of in a big mass. Our strategist did a bunch of research and came up with a program called Friendology. It goes through a whole bunch of different series of lessons and it's actually catered to all ages of our middle school. It's basically weekly or biweekly lessons. I anticipate hearing some more communication from your classroom teachers about it because it's not a one-off lesson. It's that constantly finding those moments to reinforce it with all our students. Topics include being self-aware and positive self-talk to being a big part of healthy relationships to also knowing the difference between bullying and being mean on purpose. We are looking forward to it.

- **International Field Trip** - Next year, we are going to take a small group of around 35 students to France and Spain. We're going to prioritize the students who are taking second languages as part of their experience for their program. This year we have 72 students going to Japan this Spring Break and 12 staff. We are really excited about that and we had students design hoodies for the trip. It's absolutely going to be an amazing trip and I anticipate you'll be able to hear more when we come back. We are quite fortunate that we get to go back to traveling, it has always been a big thing at Westmount.

**Question (Roti): Is the prep rally the same as the Seniors Night?**

No, the prep rally we usually do at the beginning of the school year and it is more to get people excited. Seniors Night truly is more of an end of the season type event. During Seniors Night we basically say a nice thing about each Grade 12 athlete, the contributions they've made. It's a really nice tradition. For some of these students, it might be the last time they play competitive sports.

**Question (Roti): I'm curious, what was the attendance like from the students for the Career Fair?**

I'd say the larger sessions easily had up to 20 students and some sessions were one-on-one. And those students loved the opportunity to talk one-on-one. We had a couple of parents stay with their children. That worked well, because it helped with the conversations. Each session went over each time.

**Question (Thomas): Was it students from all grades?**

It was geared towards Grade 9 and up. However, because of siblings, we actually had a couple of younger students who did attend.

**4. "Ask me Anything" with with Dr. Myra Hood Moderated by Ashley Wilford-Matthews**

**a) Have you spent time getting to know staff and students at both campuses?**

At the beginning of my tenure, it was getting to know the policies and procedures of our school. My office is in the Elementary Campus, so proximity made it very easy for me to get to know the elementary team very quickly. It's an incredible environment at the elementary campus. I've joined some professional development sessions at the beginning of the year, which gave me a real sense of who the teachers were. I've been asked to join learning leader meetings, which have been great again is another view into the school and, and how things are done. Today I popped downstairs and met with the lunchroom supervisors, and they were an incredible group and we have several of our parents actually as part of the team.

Lots of interaction with the Charter Board, the principals and assistant principals through our leadership meetings that we have every month. We've been trying to provide support to both campuses where there's been emergent issues or things that needed to be handled fairly quickly. The Mid-High I will be located now on Mondays. I'm going over tomorrow to do a little round of the third floor teachers and sort of visit with them again. Monday as a regular thing I will be there.

What I been doing is meeting with teachers one-on-one. When I meet one-on-one, the meetings are supposed to be 10 minute conversations, but they've turned 45 to 50 minutes. It takes a long time to meet a big staff like Westmount's. Generally, the

teachers are, calling me when they have a problem or they want to discuss something. I think that's a really good positive sign. So, what I would say to all of you is, please, if there's something going on and you would like me there, just give me a shout.

**b) What do you think is going well?**

The best part of my job so far is the interaction with people. Even today just going down and talking with the lunchroom supervisors, it was very encouraging to hear what they were saying about our school and how committed they were.

**c) Will you have an office at the Mid-High Campus?**

Brandie has been amazing in giving me a space there to take over her office whenever I'm in the building. However, I'm sure that Graham will find me somewhere for Mondays and so that people know reliably that you're in the building. It does make a difference.

Graeme - Space is a premium. All our offices are used, so we're trying to find a space.

**d) What do workers and children at the schools feel is going well and could be improved?**

One thing I'm hearing over and over again is about the changing rooms. The changing rooms really need to be painted and updated. We do have a capital budget plan in place and we've requested funding. We should know by March 23<sup>rd</sup> whether we actually got the funding. A strategy that I've used before at another school is that after the Spring Break I plan to bring groups of students together, groups of staff together and groups of parents together who would like to sort of share what they see for the future of the school and share their understanding what's going well and what needs to be thought about. Watch for this in the newsletter and if you're interested, there'll be a link there to sign up and join us.

**e) Find a solution to the bullying happening in Grade 5?**

Graeme - First thing, bullying is something we absolutely take seriously. Actually, any sort of poor behavior. In terms of whether it's actual bullying or just mean behaviour, it is something that we respond to immediately. It's important to note the different ways that we hear of the behaviour. One is when it's witnessed or in front of a staff member, then it's obviously dealt with right away. The second one is when we hear about from other students and we're very fortunate, we have a wonderful student population, a lot of them who do not tolerate that kind of behaviour. The third one is from parents. A lot of times students will put on a front at school and don't really say anything. And then of course they're obviously distraught and it appears at home and they start talking to the parents. So, parents please don't ever assume we know what's going on, because sometimes kids do hide it. If there is any sort of mean behavior, please let us know.

How we handle poor behaviour, the first and foremost is preventative, right ideas and habits. So, the behaviour doesn't start in the first place. Laiba Nasir is part of our student wellness action team along with Brandie Sedore. Our high school students take great pride in helping support our younger students, so Laiba can talk about what you've done with some students.

Laiba - The student wellness action team tries to deter kids from having mean thoughts or doing mean things. More specifically we have started sending out emails to high school students to go into Grade 5 classrooms and speak about kindness and about what is happening. We spoke to these kids like why the bullying was happening and

then like a lot of ways to prevent it. We also did a bunch of child friendly exercises. A lot of my character development occurred in Grade 3 or 4, but for them, that is when Covid happened. So they were at home, they didn't really have chances to connect to their friends. There is a lot of the missing socialization piece, which meant that they weren't exactly sure how to talk to others and they weren't exactly sure when their words stopped being constructive and started being destructive.

The student wellness action team has also created a base of highschoolers where students are able to talk, even if they don't want to talk to their teachers. Some kids have already approached me and we've chatted about what's happening and then I've chatted to their teachers on behalf of them. I know that some of these kids are saying things that are just genuinely awful and I was shocked by it. Really what we're just trying to do is firstly preventative. We are trying to make sure that they know what is wrong, what is right and what they're able to do about that.

Graeme - Thank you Liaba. The first step is preventative, and we found it's so much more powerful when students actually hear it from other students. There definitely is that respect level where younger students look up to older students. The second prong of course is when something happens and how we respond. The big thing is making sure it stops. Two, making sure whoever is instigating or perpetuating the poor behavior takes ownership for their actions and then also able to learn from it. The last thing is giving them an opportunity to move forward. Make sure they have a way to move forward and basically grow as a person. The third thing is the victims. The people who have been harmed by this. Ultimately every child, we believe, deserves to be safe at school.

- f) **The drop off and pick up time has always being chaos. There are cars and pedestrians coming from all directions during the peak time. I am wondering if it's possible to make 7th Ave a one way street?**

Hal - Six or seven years ago we walked around the school, the campus and the grounds. One of the questions we put to the constable was, "Can we make Seventh Avenue a one way?". The response was, "It's a fairly well used route in Parkdale and making it a one way would interrupt the flow of traffic in Parkdale".

- g) **How can parents (especially new-to-the-school parents) become more familiar with what goes on inside the school? Attending parent council meeting is more on updates on what's happening, and I work during Coffee Chats, but it'd be nice to know more of how our kids days are spent (e.g. what they do at recess/lunch, what the atmosphere is inside, do high school students congregate / talk with middle school students, etc.)**

In terms of getting involved, if you can attend the coffee chats, it is a great way to have informal conversation. If you have particular questions, you can certainly ask them at that time. All the school events, whether it be sporting activities at night or career fairs or whatever is being offered, just keep watching the newsletter and getting them, get involved in as many of these things as you possibly can.

Hal - I thought it was a really good question. I think we talk a lot about the big things that go on, but we don't talk about the daily things very much. We have a number of amazing teaching staff at the elementary campus. I would encourage parents to just email their kids' homeroom teachers and just ask them what a typical day is like? It's going to be difficult for teachers to answer 20 emails about what a typical day looks like, but it's possible that that information could be collected and shared with parents. The other

thing that I would encourage parents to get a visitor tag and have a look around. We welcome you to the campus and just reach out to your child's homeroom teacher and get a sense of what, uh, what a day is like.

Graeme - It's also an interesting question and being a parent of a teenager, I can relate. There are definitely some commonalities, but the daily life of a child can be very unique. We don't necessarily want parents wandering around the campus, because we have so many different students on spares and it just becomes a safety issue. I'd say that sometimes we have difficulty with field trips. If you can carve out that time, and I know sometimes it's hard cause this is a time away from work, but if we can give you enough notice of that, it is an amazing way just to get to see the dynamics of your kid and their social interactions with our classmates.

**h) Are there any plans to open a south campus in the future?**

Space is at a premium in the city, particularly for the charter schools. The Charter Board has a committee headed up by Simon Corrin that has looked into many different possibilities throughout the city. It's not a problem that's just with us, facilities are very hard to come by and the reason for it is the population in all of the schools is going up. If we were looking at expanding south, our first concern would be around facilities and how we could guarantee that we could acquire the facilities. We certainly have the demand.

Simon - Just want to reiterate what Myra said, there's not a lot of availability out there and we're working the connections that we do have. Also, anything that we do at the school also needs to be taken through the lens of inside out and gifted education as well. It's not just a matter if there's an open door, we walk through it. We have our charter that we must abide by for everything that we do.

**i) Will teachers get to share input about the new elementary principal position?**

The answer to that is absolutely. It won't just be teachers, it'll be teachers and parents who'll be asked for their input. Director Peter Ku will be sending some communication out very soon to solicit some ideas on what your priorities are. A very important part of acquiring a new principal is that the fit is what people want and what will benefit our students.

**j) Is there a possibility of moving the fourth grade students downstairs and the CBE staff were on the other side upstairs at the elementary campus?**

The CBE put a tremendous amount of money into refurbishing downstairs, for their use. It is not just take the classroom and use it as an extended space, they've actually built offices and have it perfectly laid out for all of the kinds of meetings that go on. I would love that to happen, because it makes perfect sense that all the sort of central offices are upstairs and our students are more together. However, it would be cost prohibitive.

**k) Are there ever concerns about the wide range of ages in the Mid-high? Some kids would be as young as nine in Grade 5 and some students would be as old as 19 by the end of the school year?**

I think it's a very wide range of age groups for sure, wider than the norm. Normally you would see the elementary students staying together. What it comes down to is behavioral expectations within the building and holding very high standards for behavior. I think you heard Graeme articulate earlier that they not only have a plan, they're implementing it and it's not just about safeguarding the young ones but safeguarding

everyone. There are always things that we can do to improve and I do believe that the staff headed are doing an excellent job.

Graeme - It's a very common question voiced by our parents of our younger children coming up. Whether it's a Grade 4 transition or even just new to Grade 6 just that concern of these big scary high school students, what kind of influence they're going to have on my sweet little innocent child. I mention a lot of times the students can be quite anxious, especially because when you're coming from a Grade 4 where you're the oldest student in the building all sudden to becoming, there's some really big kids here. So, there's all sorts of different things that'll play into that anxiety and can honestly say that it is absolutely remarkable actually how well it works at our building. That that speaks volumes honestly to our students and the culture they create. Are there times where our high school students forget there are younger students and maybe their language is inappropriate? Absolutely. Is it dealt with immediately right away? Yes. Right. So, I think it's pretty minimal to be honest. I can understand why there will be concerns, but to be honest living it, I don't have concerns. I think it's a strength of our school, it really provides a wonderful opportunity for both our older students to be leaders and to give back, but also for our younger students to really find that connection.

Laiba - I did come here in Kindergarten, so I have been here pretty much the whole time. I made that transition into grade 5 from Grade 4 and I'll be honest it's scary. The nice thing about Westmount is that its layout. Grade 7 & 8 are on the first floor, then Grade 5 & 6 are on the second floor and the rest are on the third. If you're a high schooler that doesn't feel comfortable around little kids, you can avoid them. Same thing for the younger students, if they don't want to talk or look at high schoolers, they can avoid them. Talking more about clubs, I do run a couple of clubs. I run the senior and junior debate clubs. The junior debate club, I know a lot of kids really enjoy that mentor relationship. We also we have something called jump, which is the junior mentorship program run by STEM Fellowship. This club basically goes into Grades 5 to 7 science classes and we do science related activities. Basically, we have a lot of high schoolers who are willing to be role models. Again, if they don't want to be that role model, they just don't engage in those types of clubs. I think there's about 30 students from Grades 10 to 12 who do want to be role models. I have never had a situation where high schoolers were the ones causing issues. It is usually like in between grades when there is conflict.

**l) Can parents and students be more involved in selecting the types of Lead courses that are available?**

Colleen Thomas Groot - How to get all the students in the Lead classes they request? If there's a way, someone please come and teach me it because it's just not possible. There are Lead offerings that are really popular and more students ask for it than we have seats in all three semesters. That is why we ask for top five choices and one veto. When we are placing students in the Lead classes we start at the beginning of the alphabet and move down to fill the seats and then in the next term we start at the bottom and move up. We try as much as we can to make it fair. We try to ensure that everybody gets one or two classes from the ones they chose, but there it's just not possible with the demand. The other thing, one of the really important aspects of Lead is that it's a teacher's passion area. We want them to be teaching something that they're passionate about because that's contagious. Makes it difficult to suggest what to offer.

**m) Is there a VEX Robotics club at Westmount? And if not, can we start one?**

Laiba - We have robotics as a club and there is like a robotics team that is all Westmount students.

Graeme - It's something we've always been aware of. We recently had a group of students who attended a competition on the West Coast, which was live streamed on Twitch. The team was not actually school sponsored for a couple different reasons. One reason, is that we offer so many clubs, it is actually hard to find staff who can dedicate the amount of time for that. Usually, our staff run two or three different clubs and we are cognizant of what we can offer and not spreading ourselves too thin. We do offer robotics as part of our graded options.

**n) We had a specific question around, equipping the Mid-High around computer programming with teachers and resources?**

Graeme - We did have a staff member, who resigned, who was overseeing some of our high school computer programming. The person who is temporarily contracted has experience teaching computer programming. We have students here who are far beyond what we can teach. This again is where our clubs come in so much. We have a lot of our students run clubs like coding programs and hackathons. At the middle school level we offer computer programming, it's based on modules and there to expose kids to help them ignite that passion. If you have a child who's really passionate about it, the main thing is getting involved in those clubs.

Karly Bagnall - At the elementary campus we do it mostly during Learning Commons visits. For robotics we currently use Ozobots and Bee Botts for the Kindergarten and Grade 1 Students. We have quite a few apps on the iPads that students are getting an intro into coding with. Lots of our focus at the start is unplugged coding, getting some of those skills without devices. Right now, I'm really excited because we're doing the Astro Pi Mission Zero Challenge as a club with the Grade 4 students. They are coding to send an image to the International Space Station. We've done it a couple of years before and it's really neat, because students get a certificate back that says, location, time and date that their code ran on the International Space Station. So that's the coding club. For Lead there is an option for Micro Bit coding. Hopefully that helps.

**o) We did have two questions around vaping and smoking at the Mid-high?**

First of all it is not tolerated and it is not accepted. Have we heard stories of students vaping, whether they're in a locker room or something in between classes or during class time? Yes, we have, and we respond to it right away. The first thing is making sure it stops. It's not something we want at our school. How we move beyond from that, again, it is our response to poor behavior and understanding the way to move forward. We start off with a conversation, help them understand and then if we find that's not working, we start escalating our response. Parents are involved right away. Usually it's in the bathroom, which is, as you've heard, not really the nicest places to hang out in. It's usually to us a warning sign that there's other things going on. We delve a bit into that, because that helps us with figuring out support and a way to move forward.

**p) Someone commented on the Grade 4 to 5 transition. Some feel the jump can be quite profound. Just wondering if we can speak to that transition a little?**

Hal - We are aware that the jump is big and we're working together to see how we can do some things at the elementary campus to help students prepare. We are working with Laurie Alisat to plan out the transition for this year. I'm sure Laurie might have some things to say, but we're aware of it and we're seeing how to make things better.

Graeme - The big thing is we're really working on is communication and improving our awareness. Our Grade 5 teachers see the older grades and the continuity with what's going on with older students, but they don't really get to see the continuity with the younger grades. It is also just realizing where do we need to be intentional and support. This question is timely, because we're engaging in conversation this very month between the two campuses.

Laurie Alisat - Each year we work on this together, the two campuses. We try and coordinate what goes on in Grade 4 & 5 classrooms. But I think this year, with all of the changes that we've noticed with our students and I don't wanna say everything's about COVID, but we have noticed delays. I think that coupled with just that little bit of difference this year has been a bigger transition for students than we've noticed in the past. With new students we have them follow other students around and have them meet some older students, so they have some buddies here when they first arrive. Things just haven't played out as well as in the past this year. But yes, we try and make a really concerted effort to make that transition as seamless as possible.

**q) We just had a really great presentation from Janneke Frank last week. We would love to bring that to parents at some point and some more education around inside out. This parent specifically has asked what does inside out mean to you?**

Janneke did make an excellent presentation and we've been thinking about what to do to try and spread that word. What we were considering was asking Janneke if she would agree to have it videotaped and that we could actually have that there as a resource. We can have parents who are new to the school sit as a family and say, is this for us? Because there are parents out there who are not an inside out philosophy. They are about achievement and all about marks. Well, we are not going to be at their school if that's their major focus. We are about developing those kids to reach their potential. But parents have to have tools that they can sit down and say, yes, my child might be gifted, but is this gifted environment for us as a family because it's a very big commitment. I think that's one of the steps we can take to make sure that people coming in really understand what that is. Development rather than an acute focus on an achievement. I analyzed a lot of the data myself and we've proved it over and over that our students are highly successful when we invest in them and their development. They will reach their potential. And that is our philosophy, that's our preferred way forward.

## **5. Closing Remarks**

Roti - I want us to do as parents tonight hinges on two words. The first one is commitment. It's almost 9:00 PM and here we are on this call, parents, staff, superintendent and students. It shows the commitment we have to this school and to this community. The second word one is empathy. Listening to Laiba in particular and all that you demonstrate as a role model. It's rooted in empathy. You reflect the values of the school and on behalf of the parents on the call tonight, we truly want to wish you the very best in the future. Thank you everyone.

Hal - I just wanted to say a special thanks to our staff members in the meeting tonight. It is much appreciated. They've had long days and they have an early start tomorrow. So just a big thank you to the staff members who are here and have been here for almost two hours.

**Meeting Adjourned - 8:45 PM**