

Susan LaRosa,
Co-Chair, Human Services Planning Board,
York Catholic District School Board,
320 Bloomington Road West,
Aurora ON L4G 0M1

April 26, 2010

Dear Ms. LaRosa,

I am writing to you as the facilitator and convenor of the *School Community Round Table* that was held on February 24, 2010. The round table was hosted by a group of school and community partners who have been meeting for some time to discuss community engagement and ways to strengthen the school/community relationship in York Region.

The planning partners included representatives from the *York Region District School Board*; the *York Catholic District School Board*; the *Planning Forum on Children, Youth and Families*; the *Social Planning Council*; and *York Region Alliance to End Homelessness*.

About 80 people attended the session, which had been organized as an open space conversation. The participants identified 16 topics of interest. A summary report of the proceedings is attached for your information.

As a follow-up to the *School Community Round Table*, the planning partners have recommended that we draw your attention to discussions about two topics of interest that were raised that day: Resources for Youth in North York Region and Barriers to Collaboration – Why Can't We Just Do It? The following chart summarizes what was said that day:

Essence of Conversation	Insight	Hope
▪ Lack of leadership; lack of commitment to collaboration. ▪ What gets through doesn't always trickle down; doesn't get buy-in. ▪ Expectation that school can do it all – how realistic is that? ▪ Accountability for collaborative structures. ▪ Resistance to innovation; comfort with same old ways. ▪ Lack of common philosophy. ▪ Being clear about what a "hub" model means; exploring variations on hub models (e.g. sharing school library with community library). ▪ School safety and security. ▪ Evidence-based practice; evaluate what works and why.	Mobilizing community is a first thought not an afterthought.	A systemic structure for collaborative practice that incorporates transparency, trust, accountability. A systemic structure that provides equitable supports for the community regardless of school board or geography.

Essence of Conversation	Insight	Hope
▪ Unequal distribution of resources to north York Region. ▪ Lack of public transportation in the north is a barrier for student after school activities. ▪ Student filmmaking a promising project.	N/A	N/A

Our hope for the *School Community Round Table* was to hold a new conversation about school and community relationships. Just over half of the participants returned an evaluation. 87.7% said they would attend another *School Community Round Table*; the overall satisfaction rating was 78.6%; and 76.4% said they learned something today that made them see things differently. Our hope is that additional conversations will be held in the future. In the meantime, we are letting leaders in our community know about the interesting conversations that occurred at our first *School Community Round Table*.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at susan@proactideas.ca.

Sincerely,

Susan Taylor Simpson

Susan Taylor Simpson

Facilitator for *School Community Round Table*

c.c. Councillor Joyce Frustaglio, Co- Chair of HSPB

Lisa Gonsalves, York Region

Introduction

Over the past few years, collaboration and integration at the local level, driven by both local needs and provincial policy directives, have resulted in many changes in the school-community relationship. Although partners from the school and the community often work together on a specific project or issue, there is very little opportunity to join together to share perspectives on the "big picture". A group of school and community partners who have been meeting for some time to discuss community engagement proposed discussing these and other questions, with a broader audience.

- What does community engagement mean to each of us?

- Are we getting it right?

- Are we taking advantage of all the opportunities for collaboration between community

School Community Round Table

- Are our efforts having impact?

- What else can we be doing?

Purpose

The York Region District School Board, in partnership with York Catholic District School Board, the Planning Forum on Children, Youth and Families, The Social Planning Council and York Region Alliance for End Homelessness, initiated an open space conversation to explore these questions. The first conversation took place in a school, although not limited to people who work in schools and who are directly involved in the work.

Goals

The goals of the School Community Round Table were to bring our collective wisdom together to:

- Increase achievement and success for all our children and youth;
- Share perspectives on community engagement;
- Explore a different conversation about school/community relationships; and
- Discover new ways to strengthen our school/community relationships.

The overarching question for the open space conversation was:

- How can school and community partners work together over the next ten years to support children and youth in reaching their full potential?

The Day

We asked participants to pre-register to participate to pre-register and we expected about another 50 folks, but much to our surprise 80 people in total showed up. See Appendix A for the event poster.



School Community Round Table Summary Report

Introduction

Over the past few years, collaboration and integration at the local level, driven by both local needs and provincial policy directives, have resulted in many changes in the school-community relationship. Although partners from the school and the community often work together on a specific project or issue, there is very little opportunity to join together to share perspectives on the "big picture". A group of school and community partners who have been meeting for some time to discuss community engagement proposed discussing these and other questions, with a broader audience:

- ♦ What does community engagement mean to each of us?
- ♦ Are we getting it right?
- ♦ Are we taking advantage of all the opportunities for collaboration between community partners and schools?
- ♦ Do we have shared frameworks?
- ♦ Are our efforts having impact?
- ♦ What else can we be doing?

Purpose

The *York Region District School Board*, in partnership with *York Catholic District School Board*, the *Planning Forum on Children, Youth and Families*, *The Social Planning Council* and *York Region Alliance to End Homelessness*, initiated an open space conversation to explore these questions. The first conversation took place on Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2010 and was targeted at, although not limited, to people who work in schools and with community agencies.

Goals

The goals of the *School Community Round Table* were to bring our collective wisdom together to:

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- ♦ Explore a different conversation about school/community relationships; and
- ♦ Discover new ways to strengthen our school/community relationships.

Our overarching question for the open space conversation was:

- ♦ How can school and community partners work together over the next ten years to support children and youth in reaching their full potential?

The Day

We asked participants to preregister for the *Round Table*. About 40 people registered and we expected about another 20 walk-ins, but much to our surprise, 80 people in total showed up. See Appendix A for the event poster.

We used an open space format for the meeting. Open Space opens up the agenda creation process so that all those gathered can propose sessions. This 'day-of' agenda creation ensures that there is direct relevance to those gathered for the meeting. See Appendix B for the agenda overview and a short description of the open space process.

After welcoming comments provided by Sue LaRosa, Director of Education, *York Catholic District School Board*; Ken Thurston, Director of Education, *York Region District School Board*; and Jane Wedlock, Executive Director, *York Region Alliance to End Homelessness* participants selected their discussion topics. In all, 16 topics were proposed:

School Community Round Table Summary Report

1. Extra School Costs
2. Positive School Culture
3. Resources for Youth in North York Region
4. Bullying Prevention
5. Engaging Teens in Extracurricular Activities
6. Public Libraries and Schools Working Together
7. Youth in Conflict With the Law
8. Newcomer Families
9. Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
10. The Child and Family at the Centre of Our Collaborations
11. Collaboration Between School and Community to Recruit Volunteers and Communicate With Families
12. Tapping into Resources of Multicultural Communities, such as Markham African Caribbean Association (MACA)
13. Food in Education
14. Changing the Nature of Conversation for Civic Engagement
15. The Barriers to Collaboration – Why Can't We Just Do It?
16. Bill 157: Keeping Our Kids Safe at School Act.

See Appendix C for a summary of the discussions. A copy of the verbatim notes and accompanying YouTube videos are available on the Parent, Family and Community Engagement Wiki.

Evaluation

Just over half of the participants returned an evaluation. 87.7% said they would attend another *School Community Round Table*; the overall satisfaction rating was 78.6%; and 76.4% said they learned something today that made them see things differently.

Next Steps

Many people felt the time allocated for discussion was too brief to get at the real issues. Nonetheless, a number of specific actions were recommended during the discussions. They have been captured in Appendix C under the column "Follow-up Action: Who Needs to Know?" This summary report will be forwarded to the organizations and people that have been identified.

It's important to note that Feb. 24 was only the beginning of a conversation; many people have already suggested additional actions that should be pursued. The planning group will facilitate follow-up action within their capacity and capabilities, but it must be emphasized that **follow-up action is the responsibility of everyone.**

Conclusion

Overall, the *School Community Round Table* was a welcomed opportunity for people to engage in conversation and explore solutions in a new way. As mentioned in the next steps above, this report will be forwarded to the organizations and people identified in the follow-up action.

It is recommended that these conversations continue – participants who attended on Feb. 24 said they would like to continue working together and many community residents, who were unable to attend, have asked for open space sessions during evenings or on the weekend to discuss the ways school and community partners can work together over the next ten years to support children and youth in reaching their full potential.

School Community Round Table Summary Report

For More Information:

Contact:

Susan Taylor Simpson,

ProAct Ideas

susan@proactideas.ca

See Appendix C for a summary of the discussion. A copy of the recording notes and accompanying YouTube videos are available on the [Parent, Family and Community Engagement Wiki](#).

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Appendix A

School Community Round Table

Wednesday, February 24, 2010

Lunch: 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

Round Table: 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Social Services Building: TTC Room (2nd Floor)

62 Bayview Parkway, Newmarket

(Parking in staff lot or on west side of Bayview Parkway – do not park in visitors spaces)

Over the past few years, collaboration and integration at the local level, driven by both local needs and provincial policy directives, have resulted in many changes in the school-community relationship.

- ♦ What does community engagement mean to each of us?
- ♦ Are we getting it right?
- ♦ Are we taking advantage of all the opportunities for collaboration between community partners and schools?
- ♦ Do we have shared frameworks?
- ♦ Are our efforts having impact?
- ♦ What else can we be doing?

YRDSB, in partnership with YCDSB, the *Planning Forum on Children, Youth and Families*, the *Social Planning Council*, *York Region Alliance to End Homelessness* and the *Social Planning Council of York Region*, are initiating an open space conversation to explore these questions. The first conversation will take place on Wednesday, Feb. 24 and is targeted at, although not limited, to people who work in schools and with community agencies.

The goals of the *School Community Round Table* are to bring our collective wisdom together to:

- ♦ Increase achievement and success for all our children and youth;
- ♦ Share perspectives on community engagement;
- ♦ Explore a different conversation about school/community relationships; and
- ♦ Discover new ways to strengthen our school/community relationships.

There is no cost for registration but space is limited; register using the following links:

[Community Partners](#)

[YRDSB staff](#)

For further information: Contact Scott Milne (scott.milne@yrdsb.edu.on.ca) or Susan Taylor Simpson (susan@proactideas.ca)



Appendix B

Agenda

12:00 – 1:00	Lunch/Registration
1:00 – 1:10	Opening
1:10 – 1:15	Welcome Ken Thurston, Director of Education, York Region District School Board Susan LaRosa, Director of Education, York Catholic District School Board Jane Wedlock, Executive Director, York Region Alliance to End Homelessness
1:15 – 1:30	Agenda-setting a. Give your topic a short title b. Write the topic on a sheet of paper c. Speak briefly about the topic d. Post topic on the agenda wall
1:30 – 1:45	Sign-up
1:45 – 2:30	Conversation A
2:30 – 2:45	Break
2:45 – 3:30	Conversation B
3:30 – 3:50	Report Backs Discussion leaders to briefly report back with: – 1 insight – 1 hope for the future
3:50 – 4:00	Wrap-up/Next Steps



What is an Open Space Conversation?

Open Space was created by Harrison Owen in the 1980's. Open Space is a way to bring people who have a shared interest or who want to work together on something. It could be just to explore interest in a common theme or it could be to do work together to accomplish a goal. Open Space can last several days or it can be a shorter conversation (like we are having today).

Open Space opens up the agenda creation process so that all those gathered can propose sessions. This 'day-of' agenda creation ensures that there is direct relevance to those gathered for the meeting.

How does it work?

The facilitator invites those who have something they want to talk about related to the overall theme to write on a sheet of paper the title of the topic and their name. They announce this to the room. People can ask questions about what the session is about and then they post it an agenda wall (i.e. a poster-type of grid that organizes our sessions). This goes on for about 10- 15 minutes and – voila! you have an agenda for the day.

People then select the topics they want to discuss. Meeting in their own space with the topic leader, they join in a conversation with others who share an interest in the same topic.

What are the ground rules and principles for open space?

There is one ground rule:

- ♦ Law of two feet – if you find yourself not learning or contributing at any time it is your responsibility to use your two feet to take and find somewhere you are learning or contributing.

There are four principles to successful open space:

- ♦ Whoever comes are the right people.
- ♦ Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.
- ♦ Whenever it starts is the right time.
- ♦ When it's over, it's over.

How will we capture the conversations?

Each topic leader is responsible for completing a worksheet that summarizes the conversation. All the worksheets will be compiled and shared with participants at a later date.

Also, at the end of the day, topic leaders will give a very brief report back with:

- ♦ 1 insight
- ♦ 1 hope for the future

that surfaced during their conversation. In this way, everyone will leave the day with an overview.

How Can I find out more about Open Space?

www.openingspace.net

www.openspaceworld.org

www.co-intelligence.org

Appendix C

Note: This is a condensed version of the *School Community Round Table* discussions. Verbatim notes are available on the Parent, Family and Community Engagement Wiki.

Topic	Essence of Conversation	Insight	Hope	Follow-up Action (Who Needs to Know?)
A1 Extra School Costs	- Not uncommon for extra fees for school trips, transportation and other activities; e.g. \$400-500 for school trips, \$75-\$120 for transportation. - Subsidies, when available, can be difficult to access or intimidating to applicant. - Result is lack of equity and erosion of dignity. - Process of applying for school fees needs to be more transparent.	People are passionate about and acknowledge the need for equity, access and social inclusion.	More opportunities to better understand board and ministry policies on extra costs. A more systemic approach to applying extra costs. A neutral group to investigate.	- Send <i>Round Table Report</i> to board chairs of YRDSB/YCDSB. - School community conversations and forums throughout York Region.
A2 Positive School Culture	- Subculture of schools vary depending on norms, values, demographics and leadership. - Staff is one of the most significant defining features. - COMPASS is bringing a different kind of family and community engagement to schools. - Parks and Recreation Departments can play a role.	N/A	N/A	
A3 Resources for Youth in North York region	- Unequal distribution of resources to north York region. - Lack of public transportation in the north is a barrier for student after school activities. - Student filmmaking a promising project. - Is it an oxymoron? Rules of nature determine our behaviour so that we gain power through strength. - Focus on our collective responsibility to protect weaker individuals; e.g. promote better self image for girls as a way to minimize bullying. - Important to understand dynamics of aggression and victimization. - Importance of modelling in a positive school climate. - Engage whole community, including onlookers; bullying bullies won't help.	N/A	N/A	Send <i>Round Table Report</i> to York Region Human Services Planning Board (HSPB).
A4 Bullying Prevention		It's not about punishing or excusing the bully; it's about pedagogy of respect.	Restorative approaches become second nature.	

Topic	Essence of Conversation	Insight	Hope	Follow-up Action (Who Needs to Know?)
A5 Engaging Teens in Extracurricular Activities	■ Mentoring is a good way to connect with youth. ■ Need for more mentoring programs and resources to train mentors. ■ Cultural approaches to youth outreach vary. ■ Role of corporate sector to sponsor programs. ■ Ask school staff to identify youth leaders.	Mentoring is important approach for successful youth engagement.	Youth engagement involves the whole community. Youth have access to mentors who have already travelled in their shoes.	1. Send <i>Round Table Report</i> to York Region Planning Forum on Children, Youth and Families. 2. Region-wide symposium on youth mentoring.
A6 Public Libraries and Schools Working Together	■ Exploration of ways libraries and schools can work together to support children.	There is benefit in exploring what gaps libraries can fill to support schools.	Schools learn to be as welcoming as libraries.	
A7 Youth in Conflict With the Law	■ Mistrust between youth and police is a major issue. ■ Student voice not heard, especially marginalized youth. ■ Youth need to feel sense of ownership; offer more and better youth forums. ■ Need for more psychological support services before a problem becomes a crisis. ■ Need for a task force to explore problems and solutions. ■ Not just a school or police issue – but a community issue. ■ Need more support for restorative justice. ■ Need more education about <i>Bill 157: Keeping Our Kids Safe at School Act</i>. ■ Need to take closer look at challenges faced by some youth; e.g. mental health, learning disabilities.	We need more opportunities to learn from each other and share knowledge. Focus on marginalized youth. Need to engage social services earlier, not just after youth are in trouble.	We help kids earlier and shift focus to prevention. We continue to build collaborative structures and processes between police, schools, youth and community partners. We succeed in keeping kids in school until they graduate.	1. Send <i>Round Table Report</i> to York Regional Police. 2. Establish a Task Force.
A8 Newcomer Families	■ Exploring ways to make schools welcoming to newcomers. ■ Principal and staff are key to creating a welcoming school climate. ■ Organize self-help groups. ■ Need to recognize 2 stages of support: culture-specific and integrated. ■ School councils are a way to implement programs of welcoming and support.	There is increasing urgency to focus on the needs of newcomers. Need for systems change to provide supports.	This discussion leads to ACTION!	1. Send <i>Round Table Report</i> to board chairs of YRDSB/YCDSB. 2. Send <i>Round Table Report</i> to newcomer and settlement service agencies and networks. 3. Send <i>Round Table Report</i> to Local Immigration Partnership project.

Topic	Essence of Conversation	Insight	Hope	Follow-up Action (Who Needs to Know?)
B1 Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	ASD and ADHD are downstream disorders rather than something one is born with.	What schools promise to deliver does not always happen. What parents want is not always realistic.	Enhanced advocacy and education for parents. Parents and special education teachers learn from each other about how to help special needs children thrive and become as independent as possible.	1. Send <i>Round Table Report</i> to ASD Implementation Steering Committee.
B2 The Child and Family at the Centre of Our Collaborations	- Focus on the needs of family and children. - Family factors (e.g. poverty) impact readiness to learn but they are not issues teachers can directly influence. - A change in organizational culture is needed; leadership from upper management; increased focus on prevention; engaging the right people. - Resistance often a result of busy schedules and constraints in resources. - Explore how to engage people and collaborate to work as a team.	For child and family to be at the centre there needs to be structural change within organizations. School and community have much to learn and share with each other.	Use existing planning tables to collaborate and plan proactively together. Engage the "right" people to build awareness.	1. A "Planning Table" Summit – each planning table in York Region send 3-5 representatives to a one-day session to reflect on current state of collaboration in York Region and solutions to barriers.
B3 Collaboration Between School and Community to Recruit Volunteers and Communicate With Families	- Difficulty in recruiting volunteers limits availability of school-based programs. - Discussion of ways volunteers 17+ years can add capacity to system. - Agencies have information and resources to share; e.g. food network providing snacks for programs.	Agency-provided programs are beneficial to students and staff in schools but provision of programs is limited by lack of volunteers. A forum to bring grassroots organizations together is needed.	Greater sharing of resources between community agencies and schools. Increased communication between community agencies and schools.	1. <i>Volunteers and Schools Summit</i> use GIVE infrastructure to host a York Region-wide summit.
B4 Tapping into resources of multicultural communities, such as Markham African Caribbean Association (MACA).	- Overview of age group, activities and resources provided by MACA. - YRDSB provides space and a teacher for Saturday school; school now ready to receive students.	Large number of agencies and community organizations work together towards common goals.	More forums like this so that organizations become more aware of each other.	

Topic	Essence of Conversation	Insight	Hope	Follow-up Action (Who Needs to Know?)
B5 Food in Education	- Basic food skills are key to long term health. - All schools should teach cooking skills to children. - All schools need public health-approved kitchens. - Community gardens provide opportunities to engage community.	Good food is the basis of good health; healthy kids learn better.	Food literacy for all through cooking, growing, shopping and eating.	1. Send <i>Round Table Report</i> to York Region Food Network.
B6 Changing the Nature of Conversation for Civic Engagement	- Questions to ask: - To what extent are you here by choice? - What declarations are you prepared to make about the possibilities for the future? - How invested and participative do you plan to be in this meeting? - To what extent do you see yourself as part of the cause of what we are trying to fix? - What are your doubts and reservations? - What gifts have you received from others?	This conversation about school/community engagement is a positive step forward; it provides opportunity for individuals to have a say.	We say what community means to each of us. We engage community members in authentic conversations.	1. Host a discussion series.
B7 The Barriers to Collaboration – Why Can't We Just Do It?	- Lack of leadership; lack of commitment to collaboration. - What gets through doesn't always trickle down; doesn't get buy-in. - Expectation that school can do it all – how realistic is that? - Accountability for collaborative structures. - Resistance to innovation; comfort with same old ways. - Lack of common philosophy. - Being clear about what a "hub" model means; exploring variations on hub models (e.g. sharing school library with community library). - School safety and security. - Evidence-based practice; evaluate what works and why.	Mobilizing community is a first thought not an afterthought.	A systemic structure for collaborative practice that incorporates transparency, trust, accountability. A systemic structure that provides equitable supports for the community regardless of school board or geography.	1. Send <i>Round Table Report</i> to Human Services Planning Board (HSPB). 2. A " <i>Planning Table</i> " Summit – each planning table in York Region send 3-5 representatives to a one-day session to reflect on current state of collaboration in York Region and solutions to barriers.
B8 Bill 157: Keeping Our Kids Safe at School Act.	- Need for partnerships between youth justice services and school boards so that young people graduate secondary school. - Review procedures around suspensions and expulsions. - Keeping troubled kids in school.	N/A	N/A	