



**Jewish Federation of Ottawa
Board of Directors Meeting
Summary of Discussion as a Report to the Community
Thursday, February 26, 2015**

In Attendance: Stuart Ages, David Appotive, Lauren Bronstein, Jennifer Kardash, Linda Kerzner, Steven Kimmel, Jason Shinder, Hartley Stern, Lenora Zelikovitz

Staff: Bram Bregman, Shelley Crawford, Andrea Freedman, Leslie Kaufman, Arieh Rosenblum

Observers: Sharon Appotive, Jeffrey Miller, Lisa Miller (partial)

Recorder: Rachel Abenhaim

I. Welcome

Steven Kimmel welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming to the meeting on such short notice.

He explained that the special meeting was called to discuss OJCS's decision to phase out operation of the high school.

II. Ottawa Jewish Community School (OJCS) Update

Steven introduced Lisa Miller, past-chair of the OJCS board, who would be providing the Federation board with an update on the high school and further information on the "Save the High School" grassroots group request.

Lisa explained that in response to continued communications from the grassroots group, the OJCS board invited two representatives from the group to a meeting to present their proposal. Andrea Freedman was invited to attend as an observer.

The group identified their objectives:

- 1) Overturn the decision to phase out the high school
- 2) Allow the current grade 8 class to transition to grade 9 next year

The grassroots group explained that if the board committed to the above request, the group had commitments of close to \$130,000 to sustain a grade 9 class and would continue its attempts to recruit students for the 2015 academic school year, for which they felt they had already secured several students.

They highlighted how much support they were getting from the community and requested the OJCS board respond to their request in 48 hours.

Lisa explained the OJCS board is concerned by the following:

- The student enrollments committed to by the grassroots group are the same students the sustainability committee originally forecasted transitioning from grade 8 to grade 9. The group did not present any new prospects for grade 9, although, potentially did for some later grades.
- There is discomfort around the grassroots group fundraising efforts because the OJCS board has had no input or information on the approach being taken (including promises being made).
- The OJCS Board is not aligned on a decision. Some feel the community interest and the grassroots group efforts should not be refused, while others believe it hinders the board's ability to evaluate a sustainable long term solution for the high school. Furthermore, there is concern that the board has to focus on the elementary school, or that too will be in peril. One area of agreement is that they value grassroots participation in working towards a solution.
- There is a concern that if they allow an incoming grade 9 class, and no sustainable option is found and the high school has to close in a year from now, the community will once again be involved in a painful process.
- It was also noted that the financial situation had not changed since the OJCS board decided it would phase out the high school. Moving forward with another year would lead to further financial shortfalls.

Conversations continued around the positive community response in working towards having a Jewish high school in Ottawa, and the need to reevaluate the existing model for the high school to be successful in the future. The OJCS board supported Federation's idea to create a structured task force that would recruit community volunteers and parents, and would have a mandate to study Jewish high school education for Ottawa.

A point was raised about the communications to the community and parents leading up to the announcement about closing the high school. It was agreed that in the future, especially with regards to the position of the elementary school, communication efforts can be improved.

At this stage, Steven Kimmel thanked Lisa for presenting, and reinforced the message that the Federation continues to support the OJCS board during this difficult time. Lisa Miller excused herself from the meeting.

Andrea Freedman provided some additional updates:

- Federation executives contacted top donors to touch base about their reactions to the decision:
 - Although sad & concerned, most were not surprised and supported the difficult decision
 - Inquired on future steps being taken for sustainability
- Challenges:
 - Key leaders & community members are taking a controversial & public stance on the issue (e.g. a small number of community Rabbis and agency executive directors)
 - Maintaining full transparency proves challenging as information evolves quickly
- Federation is working closely with OJCS to remain aligned
- Enrollment at the elementary school remains a concern and an on-going community priority

The board discussed its role in the matter and concluded the following:

- Although the issue has broader community ramifications, Federation re-affirms the autonomy of the OJCS board in making decisions pertaining to operating the school.
- As such, Federation supports the OJCS board's original decision to phase-out operation of the high school.
- Federation remains committed to Jewish education. Regardless of whether or not there is an incoming grade 9 class in the fall of 2015, Federation will launch a task force to explore models of delivering Jewish education for high school aged children in Ottawa. The goal will be to bring together OJCS and community leaders, educators, and representatives from the new grassroots group to systematically study the issue and examine innovative approaches.

The meeting was adjourned.