

**Name of Committee**: Alternative Schools Community Advisory Committee

**Meeting Date**: 29 May 2023

A meeting of the Alternative Schools Community Advisory Committee (ASCAC) convened on May 29, 2023, from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm via Virtual Meeting (Zoom) with Jacob Leibovitch and Laurie McAllister (Co-Chairs) presiding.

| **Membership****Attendance**: | Sarah Bogatie (Student, Avondale Alternative Secondary School; Secondary School Student Representative); Diana Grimaldos (Parent, Mountview Alternative Junior School, ASCAC Member); Serge Guschin (Parent, Beaches alternative School, ASCAC Member); Joanne Huber (Parent, High Park Alternative JS, ASCAC Member), Olga Ingrahm (Parent, Alternative Scarborough Education 1, ASCAC Member), Shelley Laskin (Trustee Ward 8, ASCAC Trustee Co-Chair); Jacob Leibovitch (Parent, ALPHA Alternative Junior School, ASCAC Co-Chair); Laurie McAllister (Parent, Avondale Secondary Alternative School, ASCAC Co-Chair) |
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| **Staff Lead:** | Peter Chang (TDSB System Superintendent) |
| **Recorder:** | Anna Catalano, ASCAC Committee Assistant |
| **Regrets**: |  |

| **ITEM** | **DISCUSSION** |
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| 1. **Land Acknowledgement, Welcome/ Introductions**
 | Laurie McAllister, Secondary Alternative School Parent Co-Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.  |
| 1. **Approval of Agenda**

**Declarations of Possible Conflicts** | The agenda was approved.No conflicts were declared. |
| 1. **Co-Chair Updates**
 | Laurie informed the ASCAC Members that a special meeting will be held in June to review and approve the ASCAC minutes for the 2022-23 school year.Laurie acknowledged that the past two months have been difficult for the community, ASCAC members, and staff due to the Elementary Alternative Schools Central Application Process (EASCAP) error. Laurie mentioned to everyone that during tonight’s discussions the focus will be on accountability, transparency, and communication. These discussions will be at the system level only. She also mentioned that there is now a lack of trust and that the Director of Education acknowledged that because of the error the trust has been lost. As we move forward, the hope is that we come together with the perspective of working towards something better focusing on better transparency, better community engagement, and a better understanding of equity and inclusion.Laurie provided a brief overview of ASCAC’s role, which is to advise the TDSB on matters concerning the 19 elementary alternative schools and 21 secondary alternative schools. ASCAC Members are volunteers and are parents and caregivers, elementary and secondary school students, a Trustee Co-Chair and a TDSB Staff lead. Laurie has been the Secondary Alternative School Co-chair since October 2021, and her two-year term is up. At the October 23 meeting, elections will be held for the Secondary Alternative Co-chair and Members at large. Please refer to ASCAC’s [Terms of Reference](https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/0/Community/Community%20Advisory%20committees/asac/ASAC_Terms_of_Reference.pdf) for complete information on ASCAC’s mandate, membership and composition, terms of membership, etc. Anyone interested in being an ASCAC member can reach out to Laurie.  |
| 1. **Secondary Alternative Schools Updates**
* ASCAC’s recommendation to FBEC related to program viability for the 2023-24 budget; the Secondary Alt Schools Review; secondary student rep report.
 | Laurie mentioned that Secondary Alternative Schools (SAS) provide a critical space for students who face external and internal challenges which increases the risk of these students not graduating. Many of these students spend time out of school or are in attendance programs, they switch schools multiple times, they are marginalized, or struggle with mental health issues and have generally not been supported in the mainstream. Parents, caregivers, TDSB staff and trustees have heard many times about the life saving impacts SAS have on current and past students. Challenge - the same staffing formula that is used for the mainstream is used for SAS. This is flawed as it does not account for the minimum number of teachers required to run the programs. ASCAC’s position has been that these spaces need to be protected, supported, and set up in a way that SAS benefits students who need these schools.At the February 23, 2022, Program and School Services Committee meeting, ASCAC made a Secondary Alternative School Staffing recommendation. ASCAC recommended that the TDSB consider program viability for staffing SAS instead of projected enrolment and program viability as the primary driver until the SAS review is complete and the recommendations to staffing is completed. To read the full report click [here](https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Leadership/Boardroom/Agenda-Minutes/Type/A?Folder=Agenda%2f20220223&Filename=5.4.pdf). At the April 24, 2023, Special Finance, Budget and Enrolment Committee meeting, ASCAC presented a [recommendation](https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Leadership/Boardroom/Agenda-Minutes/Type/A?Folder=Agenda%2f20230424(1)&Filename=4.1+ASCAC+Report.pdf) reminding the Board of its commitment to SAS regarding staffing allocation.All recommendations were approved.Peter confirmed that SAS received supplemental staffing hence allowing SAS to maintain program viability for the 2023-24 school year. There will be a minimum of three teachers in each school and schools with greater enrolment will receive additional staff.On May 5, 2021, ASCAC presented to the Program and School Services Committee (PSSC) a [recommendation](https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Leadership/Boardroom/Agenda-Minutes/Type/A?Folder=Agenda%2f20210505&Filename=5.1.pdf) that the Board conduct a review of Secondary Alternative Schools. Staff were asked to review ASCAC’s recommendation and report back. Staff reviewed the recommendation to determine the feasibility and potential timelines of a review of all Secondary Alternative Schools in TDSB, and presented the [Review of Secondary Alternative Schools Feasibility Report](https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Leadership/Boardroom/Agenda-Minutes/Type/A?Folder=Agenda/20210609&Filename=7.pdf) to PSSC on June 9, 2021. The SAS Review is scheduled for fall 2023. The rationale for the review was based on the sizes and enrolment at the secondary schools. Some schools operated under capacity while others were at overcapacity. There is a possibility of some consolidation which would allow more programming at each school. There were discussions about the structure that will be used for the review, who will be consulted, the role of ASCAC, etc., particularly since there is no TDSB policy or procedure which would govern this type of review. How will the process reach those whose lived experiences should be considered? Peter acknowledged that the review would take a few years to complete and that many stakeholders will be consulted (e.g., students, parents, staff). The TDSB did a Secondary Program and French review, and the SAS Working Group will consult with these staff for guidance. Information from this discussion will be brought back to the SAS Working Group. It was noted that consideration needs to be given to the differences in alternative school communities versus FSL communities in the approach to a review, the limitations of the usual forums that the TDSB uses for feedback and prioritizing the people who represent alternative secondary school populations.Sarah gave an update about the Student Conference that was held on Thursday, May 11, 2023. The conference was organized by the students at East York Secondary Alternative School. Sarah mentioned that it was a beautiful experience witnessing the number of students who attended the conference. All the students were motivated to work together to better the Secondary Alternative Schools (SAS). An issue that was discovered was that by the time the students are deeply involved, they are graduating. Sarah was wondering if alumni could be a part of the community as they still support alternative schools. Trustee Laskin mentioned that alumni would be like parent community groups. The alumni group can then make recommendations, depute at Committee or Board meetings, etc. School Councils have community parents as part of their membership. **Action:** ASCAC Members to discuss how to make this work and allow alumni to be part of the membership. |
| 1. **Centralized Elementary Admissions Error**
* Background and current status
* ASCAC’s recommendation to FBEC
* Discussion re: TDSB’s response to the error; recommendations
 | **Background**At the May 5, 2021 PSSC meeting, ASCAC made a [recommendation](https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Leadership/Boardroom/Agenda-Minutes/Type/A?Folder=Agenda%2f20210505&Filename=5.1.pdf) that the Director:* *conduct a review of the application and admission procedures across all elementary alternative schools to ensure they are consistent and equitable*
* *consider creating a centralized elementary alternative schools’ application form as well as one set of clear and detailed admissions procedures for all elementary alternative schools to ensure consistency, equity, and remove potential barriers*.
* *that the application process be clearly posted on the TDSB website to make it easily accessible to the schools and the general public for reference.*

The recommendation was approved at the PSSC and Board meeting.Prior to this year, each Elementary Alternative School (EAS) was responsible for its own admission process. Many schools had demonstrated the value of implementing a process which prioritized students whose identities are marginalized. ASCAC believes that all system processes should be inclusive and equitable. When the process was shared with ASCAC, they shared their concern that the Elementary Alternative Schools Central Application Process (EAS CAP) did not align with its intent, including that it differed from the Central Student Interest Program (CSIP) in that families could not prioritize their school choices and did not seem to be designed to fill every seat. Other concerns raised included barriers in the application process, and inclusivity concerns on the application form. The Committee also asked for and received, confirmation that there would be no risk to those who self-identified, i.e., that their decision to participate in the “priority” process would not put them at a disadvantage. Laurie provided a brief overview of the random selection process and what she observed during the process. The first round took place on March 8 and the second round on March 22. April 4 applicants were notified of the error during the random selection process – Priority 3 students (those who self-identified as belonging to an underrepresented community) who were waitlisted were not merged into the main random selection process. Refer to [Elementary Alternative Schools Update](https://www.tdsb.on.ca/home/ctl/Details/mid/43823/itemId/103) web page for additional information.Information provided in TDSB communication related to the error included some misleading statements. There was concern that these misleading statements minimized the harm caused (e.g., “Every Indigenous applicant was accepted to available space”) and were used to support negative public discourse regarding equity efforts. ASCAC spoke to families who have been disenfranchised by this error. ASCAC held an emergency meeting on April 21, 2023 and drafted a [recommendation](https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Leadership/Boardroom/Agenda-Minutes/Type/A?Folder=Agenda%2f20230515&Filename=5.1+ASCCAC.pdf) which was presented at the May 15, 2023 Finance, Budget, Enrolment Committee meeting. ASCAC recommended that *WHEREAS the TDSB has committed to provide equity of access to learning opportunities for all students;* *AND WHEREAS a breach of the 2023/24 centralized elementary alternative school admissions process excluded students who disclosed aspects of their identity which are protected by the Human Rights Code, and the TDSB has indicated that it may, where possible, allocate 89 currently available spaces to those students as a restorative measure;* *AND WHEREAS the number of students excluded from the process based on their disclosure of race, disability and 2SLGBTQIA+ identity is greater than 89, and such potential allocation is neither equitable nor restorative, the Alternative Schools Community Advisory Committee recommends that:* *in its review and approval of the 2023/24 Operating Budget, the Board allocate appropriate funding and resources for reparative measures, to enable a resolution which is equitable, and restorative, for students disenfranchised by the 2023/24 centralized elementary alternative school admissions process.*On April 21, 2023, the Board released a statement that it determined that 98 additional spots should have gone to students from underrepresented groups, and the Board created 34 more seats across the 17 schools and these additional seats will also be offered to students from underrepresented groups for a total of 132 seats. It was noted that the 132 seats were also offered to students who self-identified as First Nations, Metis and Inuit and siblings on the waitlist. Refer to [Elementary Alternative Schools Update](https://www.tdsb.on.ca/home/ctl/Details/mid/43823/itemId/103) web page for additional information.Following is some of ASCAC’s concerns with the TDSB’s reparative measures:* because not all students could be seated, some students, who have been disenfranchised, are still on the waitlist and have never been given full consideration; 290 students were left without a resolution
* ASCAC did not understand why the lottery was not repeated as the reparative measure
* while alternative schools are not guaranteed to have small class sizes, ASCAC was concerned about the impact on students who were excluded from the lottery but are now being offered seats by increasing class sizes – the increase in class size is creating a divide in communities,
* how will incoming students get the support they deserve
* how is the Board going to support these students

ASCAC had many conversations with the alternative schools’ community and based on those conversations presented the following draft recommendations for discussion:**RECOMMENDATION 1***WHEREAS the elementary alternative schools admissions process must be transparent, and the TDSB has indicated that it will review the admissions process, including whether the process design was equitable, and will consult ASCAC with respect to any new process, therefore the Alternative Schools Community Advisory Committee recommends that:* 1. *ASCAC be involved in a full scope review of the procedure, the design process, and events that led to the administrative error;*
2. *the Board ensures that ASCAC is consulted in reviewing any new lottery process and procedure in consultation with school administrators;*
3. *review and consultation in relation to (i) and (ii) above should include independent third parties or community experts with demonstrated experience in equity in education, and that any new process will define equity criteria.*

**RECOMMENDATION 2***WHEREAS the TDSB has acknowledged the negative impact of the remedy to the admissions error and has committed to support elementary alternative school communities, the Alternative Schools Community Advisory Committee recommends that:*1. *the TDSB inform ASCAC of the detailed plan, including resources to be provided, intended to welcome incoming families and current student bodies of elementary alternative schools; and*
2. *the Parent Engagement Office and the Human Rights Office collaborate to deliver capacity-building opportunities focused on equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging, open to all parents and caregivers; and mandatory training for all elementary alternative school councils, to create welcoming communities.*

A few concerns were brought up:* development and implementation of procedures or processes
* staff will need to review these recommendations to see what can and cannot be done, staff planned to use the application procedure as it was designed, and involving ASCAC in a review may not be feasible due to timelines
* ASCAC is concerned that the outcome of the procedure/process does not support the intent of the policy, or the intent of the recommendation
* Loss of trust and how is the trust regained – the Director of Education acknowledged the loss of trust, ASCAC believes an important step in regaining trust is being involved with the review, being involved in the next step of the process
* At the FBEC meeting there was a commitment to support these schools, what is the plan for this support?
* There was confusion about the staff plan to use the same application procedure and process and not consult with ASCAC, as the TDSB publicly committed to engage with ASCAC in a review, in FAQs about the error and by the Director of Education
* Consulting with the alternative school administrators and ASCAC
* The recommendations should be simple and direct, and that it meets what the role of the Trustee is when making recommendation or advising the Board
* Commitment was made by Associate Director Audley Salmon that ASCAC would be consulted with respect to the application procedures/ process

**Action:** The two above ASCAC’s recommendations are deferred to the June 19, 2023, special meeting. ASCAC will connect with staff on what the recommendations will look like.  |
| 1. **Board Updates**
 | Deferred to allow more time for Open Floor |
| 1. **Open Floor**

Meeting attendees may raise any matter, question, or concern they wish to discuss with the ASCAC Executive, member Trustees and/or Superintendent. The open floor will start with meeting attendees who submitted requests to speak. | An attendee asked to speak and asked who made the decision to add the additional seats after the error occurred. Central staff made the decision to look at how many seats were available at each school and grade and to maximize class sizes while ensuring that policies and procedures were followed. School Administrators were consulted about this prior to the next placement; however, school administrations do not have the authority to create additional seats. |
| 1. **Adjournment and Next Meeting**
 | Meeting was adjourned at 8:35pm**Next Meeting:** Monday, October 23 from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. |
| 1. **Future Meeting Dates**
 | Monday, December 18 from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. |