

*Budget Meeting:
Thursday, April 22, 2021 (5:00-5:30pm)*

Brief summary from Student Symposium (held virtually April 21, 2021)

68 participants from NWSS, EGMS, and QMS.

Mental Health and Supports – Main Themes:

1. Blended learning has negatively affected mental health this year: students have struggled with the quarter system, online learning, remote learning; they are ready to go back to the semester system at NWSS

2. Anxiety about the glass at the new school – everyone is always visible – wondering if there will be glass frosting or blinds on some classrooms. Major concerns with privacy at the counselling office – people walking by can see inside so counsellors need to close their blinds during meetings.

3. Educate teachers on mental health issues by using Pro-D Days – teachers can then begin to understand challenges their students face and can act as another supportive adult. Teachers need training around mental health issues and how to help. Students believe class time should be devoted to educating everyone on mental health challenges and coping tools, this will work towards removing the stigma.

Students would like to see teachers acknowledge different learning styles in the classroom and have a sense from their students about what worries them. Ask them how they learn best so students can work through their challenges. They want teachers to be understanding and flexible. Outdated teaching styles are actually hindering growth for students.

4. Educate parents on mental health – provide resources or have a session where parents learn about mental health issues (anxiety, depression, stress) and how they can support their kids. Even if they can't help them specifically, they can have more of an understanding of what students are going through.

5. More sexual health education – students know this is part of PE, but they would like to see much more education around it, either in classes or guest speakers/presentations. Teachers are doing their best, but experts on these topics are needed (more on this with harassment issues later).

6. Karen, the 'drug lady' is not here this year – wondering if the district is going to have a replacement. Students are missing having access to her as another supportive adult.

Throughout the session, students shared coping mechanisms for stress and anxiety. Many said they would like to see more student support for just talking about these issues. There is a club at NWSS but students suggested perhaps support groups more specific to a particular mental health issue. Holding sessions or meetings with people who can listen and support would be useful. Students are also looking forward to the NLC opening where they can access more resources and support.

Inclusive Ed/Anti-Racism Work – Main Themes:

Inclusive Ed:

Academic support at NWSS is good with the junior and senior HUB although some students felt some teachers do not always let them go there. There are still many students unaware of the support and where to find it. Middle school students would like to see a HUB model at their school. Students also felt that ELL students are in classes where it is expected they meet the same standard as everyone else with little support. More resources are needed for students who are visually and auditory impaired and more technology for students to use Chromebooks when needed.

Transition to Grade 9 - always a theme at the Symposium. Students have many questions and a lot of anxiety about the changes coming. How can we make grade 9 students feel included? Perhaps create a district online forum or Q&A to help ease their worries and anxieties. It would be nice to have some special events at NWSS for our grade 9 students when things are back to 'normal.'

More awareness and education needed around 'jokes' that are insensitive - students discussed calling out inappropriate behaviour around jokes that have to do with disabilities, sexuality, or ethnicity. This is hurtful to students in our community and must stop.

A strict district policy around sexual harassment in our schools - there has been more awareness around this recently with Makena Thomas's petition. She is currently working with admin at NWSS to come up with some ideas around this. Students want to see more education and action taken here as it is a major problem and is leaving many students feeling unsafe and violated at school.

Anti-Racism Work:

As part of the school curriculum:

- students can see that we are progressing with being more inclusive of different cultures in various subject areas, although this is very teacher dependent. Materials/resources need to be more diverse.
- students want to learn more about different cultural groups apart from the overarching theme of colonization. It seems most learning in classrooms about minorities or injustices have to do with colonialism. How about traditions, stories, ways of life, accomplishments just for the sake of learning and appreciating them?
- more language classes should be offered, including sign language
- more language classes or options for middle school students

Anti-racism work must start early – students felt discussions around racism, being inclusive, LGBTQ+, and consent should begin in elementary school because it is never too early.

Support for those experiencing racism – there was discussion about having a resource or place to go when someone experiences racism. It needs to be addressed so the person does not just feel like a victim. There need to be real consequences for those who are racist in their actions or speech.

The facilitators for the anti-racism group struggled at the beginning and found it very challenging to run their sessions. It shows we have a long way to go to begin to unpack such difficult and sensitive topics and it's going to take a lot of commitment and learning along the way.

Climate Action – Main Themes:

At the School level:

- make all supplies for the school biodegradable, recyclable, eco-friendly
- garbage bins specifically for reusable masks so they can be disposed of properly
- create community gardens to teach students about growing food, plants, flowers (perhaps food grown could support what is prepared and served in the NWSS Servery, this could be part of science curriculum, food studies)
- plant a living roof on the school
- don't need to use lights with all the natural light in the new NWSS building, let's conserve energy

NWSS Cafeteria/Servery:

- everything should be compostable
- students must bring their own water bottles and mugs for tea
- have meatless days in the Servery for meal options
- more vegan options

District level:

- have district wide challenges or days/weeks that promote environmentally friendly living – bottle drives, “bike to school” initiatives, work on ways to conserve energy.
- more general education on climate change and ways that we can reduce our carbon footprint: presentations, guest speakers
- Perhaps a specific course or program on this topic and ways that students can be put to action