

## **Summary up to this point**

To reiterate what we've already discussed, neither Northern's admin nor Northern's student council knows much about the current state of the student body. We don't know how we're doing with mental health, with online school, with feelings of safety or acceptance. For that reason, the TDSB Senators and I had planned to put out a school-wide survey via Google Forms. Its structure would be inspired by the 2019 Graduate Exit Survey that was put out by admin. Its specific content would be inspired by critical school stakeholders, specifically the TDSB Senators, the GSA, WellNSS, Feminist Association, and Social Justice Association. Each of these groups are currently in the process of discussing with their members what they think we ought to find out about the Northern student body. I've encouraged them to suggest questions related to their area of focus, but they're also welcome to go beyond. I expect to receive all responses by the weekend.

We've made it clear that the questions that they're asking should have material implications. In other words, we have to be able to *do* something with the results. Asking "How happy are you feeling now compared to before the pandemic" is not a good question, because it tells us nothing about what we should do when we discover that students aren't as happy. The questions need to be specific, with detailed follow-ups to ensure we get good quality information. Finally, they have to be questions that any student at the school can answer with confidence, so the survey can be universally distributed.

## **Problems**

However, there are a few problems with this model, most of which were brought to my attention on Monday when I engaged my French class in a discussion about their ideas for the content of this survey. While they suggested many valuable ideas, they also questioned the effectiveness of even using a survey. We can't be certain that people will answer our questions accurately, or that we'll get enough responses to have a representative sample. After all, an email sent out to all E-block teachers only managed to get a third of the House of Reps elected. Our survey also attempts to be universal, whereas a majority of actual school problems are local and class-specific. For example, an over-abundance of tests in the math department, or not enough time to take breaks outside if certain teachers won't accommodate. Trying to have a one-size-fits-all survey would always miss out on some of that nuance. Not to mention that a survey is static, and very impersonal.

## **What's the alternative?**

While there may be Band-Aid solutions to these particular problems, I believe I've found an alternative solution which would assuage these problems *and* help us confront the related problem of class rep disengagement.

This is something that I have the support from the Speaker/Deputy Speaker, the Exec, the TDSB Senators, and several other students on, so I've done my due diligence before bringing it to you.

What I propose is the following:

- 1) Cohort reps (or teachers, for the classes without cohort reps) would lead class discussions during their in-person learning period centered around many of the same things I talked to my French class about: student accommodations, accessibility of the student council, health and wellbeing, having an accepting environment, and so on.
  - a. Side note, I can personally testify to student willingness to take part in these conversations. The conversation I had with my French class was supposed to last ten minutes. In reality, it lasted 45 minutes. Out of a class of sixteen, thirteen students spoke, and most spoke more than five times. The people in my class told me that this was the most social, the most connected they had felt with their classes since the beginning of the quad – and some since the beginning of the school year. They all had fantastic opinions and insights, and I'm certain that our class is not unique. Our problem is not apathy, it's that we don't yet have the right environment to foster conversation and inclusion. This is a problem which I will point out extends to the House of Reps and the Senate, and we are currently experimenting with a number of ideas to address it.
  
- 2) The allotment of time to have this conversation (the longer the better, up to your judgment) would require the administration to say directly to teachers that they should set aside X minutes to accommodate these discussions.
  - a. In the paraphrased words of my French teacher, NSS teachers are too focused on their substantially condensed curriculum to think about introducing social events on their own, but students and teachers would truly benefit from this. It's worth losing some class time over.
  
- 3) As mentioned, the cohort rep or teacher would center the conversation around the items that we had envisioned would be on the survey. But since these topics would be by themselves overly broad, the specifics (including questions to spark discussion if a classroom conversation does not continue organically) would be the items deemed important by the stakeholder associations that I've been working with. Their voices are still utilised.
  - a. We don't want to have a checklist of questions that the cohort rep is required to get answers for. We want these conversations to reflect whatever each classroom cares the most about, with the cohort rep/teacher acting more as a gentle moderator than a pollster.
  - b. A set of moderator guidelines for the cohort rep/teacher to follow would need to be developed.
  - c. Admin will of course be able to review and revise topics of discussion and questions before we put this initiative into the field.
  
- 4) The cohort rep/teacher would take notes during the discussion and subsequently send the notes to us.

- 5) Since students would likely not be comfortable talking about mental health issues or other personal matters in front of the class, and because data analysts laud the value of collecting information through multiple media, we would still release a survey like we discussed previously. At the end of the class discussion, the cohort rep/teacher would tell their class that there is a survey available if they would like to provide more information
  - a. With students primed by their involvement in class discussion, we believe they will be more receptive to openly and honestly sharing more information on their own
  
- 6) From there, I with the help from the TDSB Senators would summarise these pages of notes in a set of Frequently Raised Concerns, where we identify the issues that get brought up the most. We can identify what the problems are, where the problems are, and how we can bring about change. If we were to make recommendations out of these FRCs, they would be focused not only at teachers and the administration, but also at the student council, clubs and associations, school council, or any other influential group which would have jurisdiction over the relevant matter.
  - a. It's important during these discussions that we don't shoulder all the blame on admin and teachers, and recognise the role that other groups can play in improving life at Northern.

## **Conclusion**

I recognise that this would involve quite substantial student mobilisation and telling teachers to forget about their lesson for a bit, so I welcome your questions or concerns.

With that said, I genuinely believe that this is a valuable opportunity to hear what students have to say firsthand. It would provide many Northern's students with the much-needed chance to be open and to connect with their classmates, not to mention all the substantive good that could come as a result of the information we collect. This idea has evolved over time, has included a great deal of deliberation among several students, and we've come to this point with widespread confidence in the ways this could benefit our school.