The 2020-21 Elmdale school year was like no other. The COVID-19 pandemic took its toll on everyone, and, for large chunks of the winter and spring semester, Elmdale was closed in order to stop the spread of the virus.

Even before schools closed, parents, teachers, staff and kids had to adapt and innovate. They had to learn in new, socially distanced, safe ways, wearing masks for eight or more hours and sanitizing hands at every opportunity. Traditional pedagogy was flipped on its head and teachers had to find creative solutions on the fly. When schools did close, our kids were at home to learn online at virtual school. Elmdale teachers and staff had to manage hours-long video calls, and parents juggled their work alongside family responsibilities. There weren’t enough hours in the day and everyone’s mental and physical health suffered.

Making matters even tougher were the ongoing renovations at Elmdale. Rather than going to school in our local community, our kids had to be bussed or driven to Nepean. Parents were worried COVID would further delay our renovations and we would be at Century for another year or more.

In such a stressful scenario, it would have been easy for Elmdale parent council to sit back and rest on its laurels; to take a break and focus on fighting the fires at home. Indeed, many of the traditional council-funded activities and fundraisers were impossible to organize because of COVID. There were no ski clubs, no pizza or submarine days, no field trips or sports tournaments. What was the role of Elmdale council in a COVID pandemic? How could we fundraise and sponsor activities when we couldn’t even see each other? Were we needed?

These were hard questions. But rather than give into despair, we’re proud that Elmdale council members rose to the challenge and found new and creative ways to help our fellow parents and kids as well our teachers, staff, and local community.

The Elmdale renovation sub-committee spent countless hours working with the Ottawa Carleton School Board to ensure that our school renovations were completed on-time and to the satisfaction of parents and staff. Thanks to their efforts, we have a wonderful new playground, including a mud kitchen, dino dig, expanded sand box and many other great elements. Our kids and future students will reap the benefits of our renovations in the generations to come. Thank you to Larry Shamash, Erin Hetherington, Kimberly Patriquin, Ashley Mullin, Chris Watchorn, Rob Near, Jessica Shehan, and Catherine Rossiter, and the many other parents and council members past and present for finally realizing this long held goal and securing the future of Elmdale.

Other committees were similarly engaged throughout the year. The Elmdale Cares group created a healthy cookbook and designed video games for purchase, raising much-needed funds for local charities.

Caroline Hatton kept attending the OCASC meetings and kept us up-to-date on broader school board matters.

Rebecca Irwin and Holly Kardish organized important educational activities for parents and kids. Parents benefitted from learning more about the risks of online social media from renowned expert Paul Davis. And, late in the year, when everyone was at wit’s end, teachers and kids enjoyed special presentations from Little Ray’s Reptiles and Gees Bees Honey.

Our arts committee Asha Jhamandas and Natasha Beg inspired our students through Luv 2 Groove and MASC theatre presentations.

Kimberly and Ashley from the Health Earth committee were hard at work, too. They setup a holiday book project along the Byron Pathway and highlighted many ways our community can give back to our planet through their informative and helpful newsletters.

Erin Hetherington, Natasha Beg and Kristin Honshorst recognized that Elmdale Council would benefit from incorporating diverse perspectives. They spearhead the creation of our first Diversity and Equity Committee, establishing its founding principles and tenets, and publishing its own newsletters highlighting Black History Month and Asian Heritage Month. Elmdale council profited from their work to ensure council is an inclusive forum.

Much of the above would not have been possible without our strong fundraising committee, led by Traceylyn Watchorn. At the outset of the school year, council was faced with a fiscal challenge. We wanted to support our school, but our traditional fundraisers were impossible. Traceylyn and her team met this challenge by creating new and innovative events throughout the year, from selling school spirit wear and holiday décor and moving Book Fest online. Although Elmdale still spent more than we were able to fundraise (when the reverse is normally true) we exceeded our initial expectations and our bank balance remains healthy and able to sponsor post-pandemic activities and events.

Finally, a special mention to our Treasurers Jessica Shehan and Vanessa Sikora as well our communications expert Alison Zinini. Like past years, Jess and Vanessa and kept our books in excellent shape. But this year they also faced an audit from the school board; their diligence ensured Elmdale council passed with flying colours.

Alison was responsible for communicating all of our council work to the broader Elmdale parent community, so they knew what we were working on and how we were helping the community weather the pandemic. Alison’s engaging and timely Facebook posts helped us connect with parents even while we sheltered in place.

Outside committees, parent council also made meaningful contributions to our teachers, doing our best to ease their burden. Beyond funding their wish list, we topped up the amount available to them for tech and electronics. We also funded a one-time amount to help them with the extra costs associated with online learning. Finally, to thank the teachers and staff for their creativity, adaptability and resilience, we organized a coffee, tea and pastries event as a small token of our appreciation.

Elmdale has a reputation as an excellent school, one with strong parental and community involvement. We’re proud that parents lived our reputation this past year. You were all resilient and strong; you met many challenges head on, and you overcame them through hard work and persistence. Your contributions greatly benefited your kids, peers, and community, and, on behalf of us as co-chairs, we thank you. We look forward to working with you again this year in the same spirit of tenacity and resourcefulness as we move onwards and upwards in another school year.